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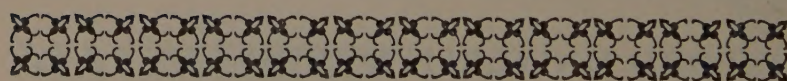

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A REVIEW OF

ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOLUME TWO NUMBER THREE JULY 1961

EDITOR: A. NORMAN JEFFARES
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Editorial

DICKENS is a novelist who has never fallen completely out of favour. He shares with Shakespeare the unusual distinction of having had a journal devoted to the study of his life and works in uninterrupted circulation for over half a century. Yet it would be correct to say that interest has quickened of late. During the last sixteen years five biographies have been published, all of them praiseworthy, and one (Edgar Johnson's *Charles Dickens, His Tragedy and Triumph*, 1952) of special merit. Even a life of his sister-in-law has appeared, as well as a substantial monograph on his mistress. Yet this number of *A Review of English Literature* shows that there are discoveries yet to be made, and Mr. D. Cleghorn Thomson's short article serves to remind us that there is still no adequate edition of Dickens's letters, though the first volume of what will be the standard edition is likely to appear next year. Nor is there a convenient edition of his miscellaneous writings, though (as Mr. P. A. W. Collins shows) they deserve attention. The novels themselves are easily accessible in cheap reprints; but the texts are known to be inaccurate, and a more detailed study of Dickens's revision of his work than can yet be undertaken will certainly provide fresh material for two new developments in Dickens criticism that are presented in this number, Professor Quirk's second instalment of his study of Dickens's language, and Professor Bodelsen's study of Dickens's names. The manuscripts and memoranda provide additional evidence of Dickens's struggle to name his characters satisfactorily. In *David Copperfield* alone the evidence is profuse, though difficult to interpret. The rejection of Mag as the hero's surname may be attributed to 'sound symbolism'; but it is not so easy to account for his final choice amongst the dozen suggestions noted down in the manuscript. 'Murdstone', for reasons given by Professor

Bodelsen, is an easily recognised improvement upon 'Hasden', 'Murdle', and 'Murden'; and 'Spenlow and Jorkins' can only have been considered as 'Aiguille and Tanguille' or 'Tranguille and Jorker' at a time when Dora's function was yet unseen. 'Dora Aiguille', forsooth, or even 'Dora Tranguille'; perish the thought. But was 'Traddles', the name which study of the manuscript reveals to have been originally designed for Barkis, so obviously inappropriate for a carrier?

As Mr. Fielding points out, the critical reassessment of Dickens's art has been moving rapidly of late. The novels, as this number shows, are still of interest to the modern novelist, and still offer some scope for differences of interpretation and valuation. This is especially true of his last novels. Some doubts are raised here about the meaning of *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend* is variously assessed as one of Dickens's supreme masterpieces and as an instructive failure. The reader, it is hoped, will wish to return to the text before reaching a decision.

J. B.

The Heroes and Heroines of Dickens

ANGUS WILSON

To examine the heroes and heroines of Dickens is to dwell on his weaknesses and failures. Only a strong conviction of Dickens's extraordinary greatness can make such an examination either worth while or decorous; since the literary critic, unlike the reviewer, can always choose his fields and should seek surely to appreciate rather than to disparage. Even in the weak field of his heroes and heroines, Dickens made remarkable advances, for though he matured—or, to use a less evaluating word, changed—late both as a man and as an artist, his immense energy drove him on through the vast field of his natural genius to attempt the conquest of the territory that lay beyond. The development of the heroes and heroines of his novels is indeed a reflection of this change or maturing, and a measure of his success in going beyond the great domain he had so easily mastered. Some of the dilemmas that lay at the root of his difficulties were personal to him; but others were historical, and some perhaps will never be solved by any novelist.

In general, the subject of Dickens's heroes has not received much attention from serious critics. Admirers have preferred to dwell on his excellencies; detractors have found more positive qualities to excite their antipathy. The child heroes and heroines brought tears to the eyes of contemporary readers, and have found equal portions of admiration and dislike in later times. There has been some general recognition that the now highly acclaimed late novels owe something of their declared superior merit to a greater depth in the portrayal of the heroes and the heroines.

I shall not here discuss the child heroes and heroines, except to

suggest that as Dickens matured he found them inadequate centres for the complex social and moral structures he was trying to compose. The children too gained in realism by being removed from the centre. The peripheral Jo has a deeply moving realism that is not there in the necessarily falsely genteel Little Nell or Oliver. It is also perhaps worth noticing as a mark of Dickens's rich genius that he could be prodigal with his gifts, making masterly child portraits of Paul, David and Pip serve merely as fractions of a large structure. Most post-Jamesian novelists would have exhausted their total energies in such portrayals of the childhood vision.

It is, however, the adult heroes and heroines with whom I am concerned. Let me first suggest the limitations which I believe hampered Dickens in successfully creating central figures in his works, and then, by analysis of the development of the heroes and heroines through his novels, throw some light perhaps upon how far he overcame or could overcome these limitations.

The historical limitations of the Victorian novelists are too well known to be worth more than a mention. The happy ending is an unfortunate distortion in Dickens's work as it is in that of the other great Victorians, but, despite the change made to *Great Expectations*, it goes deeper than a mere capitulation to the whims of readers. With Dickens as with Thackeray, though for different reasons, the contemporary idea of domestic happiness as the resolution of, or perhaps more fairly one should say, the counterpoise to social evil, was a strongly held personal conviction. Even more vital to Dickens was the idea of pure love as the means of redemption of flawed, weak, or sinful men. Neither of these beliefs can properly take the weight that he imposed upon them; though the latter, at any rate, is not such a psychological falsity perhaps as many twentieth-century critics have thought. The main destructive effort of this exaggerated view of love as a moral solvent falls upon those characters in the novels who, under any view, could be regarded as heroes and heroines. Closely allied to the popular prejudice in favour of wedding bells and the patter of tiny feet is the contemporary absolute demand for sexual

purity. There has been a recent tendency to play down the effects of this on the Victorian novel. True, these effects have so often been discussed as now to be trite, but that does not unfortunately diminish them. This censorship did, in fact, reduce the great Victorian novelists in the sexual sphere to a childish status beside their continental contemporaries. It is surprising how often they can get past the ban by suggestion; it is surprising how often the ban does not matter to an imaginative reader; again, our freedom is only relative and has its own danger of absurdity; all this is true —yet the fact remains that our great Victorian novelists were forced at times to devices that are false, ridiculous, or blurred. And these faults occur too often at the moral heart of their work. In English fashion, and with reason, we may take pride in the degree to which our Victorian novelists achieved greatness in spite of this—but we can't efface it. No characters, of course, suffer so greatly as the heroes and heroines. Once again, however, I would suggest that Dickens had a special personal relationship to this sexual censorship—and that, while it sometimes led him into exceptionally absurd devices, it also produced a characteristically powerful effect. The sexual life of Charles Dickens, like that of most Victorians, has become a shop-soiled subject, but one may briefly say four things of it—he was a strongly sensual man, he had a deep social and emotional need for family life and love, he had a compensating claustrophobic dislike of the domestic scene, and he woke up to these contradictions in his sexual make-up very late. Surely the distressing feature about the famous letter to the press upon the break-up of his marriage is not so much the tasteless publicity, but the tasteless publicity sought by a man of Dickens's years and standing. He acted at best like a young man blinded by new fame. His emotional life, in fact, for all his many children, was by most standards immature. Thackeray, very percipient where his dislike of Dickens was concerned, hit the right note, when he said of Kate, 'the poor matron'. Dickens behaved not as a middle-aged man but as a young fool or as an old fool.

The contemporary censorship, in fact, went along with, rather than against, Dickens's natural inclinations. His submerged, but

fierce, sensuality was to run some strange courses from the days of John Chester until it came to light in the diverging streams of Wrayburn and Headstone. Seduction withheld, deferred, foiled—at any rate never accomplished—produced many interesting and complex characters, who would not have been born in a fiction that reflected the real world where men are more resolute and women are weaker.

Perhaps even more important in its effect on his heroes and heroines than the imperfect view of love and the impossible view of sex that Dickens shared with his readers, was the ambiguous view of Victorian society that he shared with so many of the artists and intellectuals of his age. Broadly speaking, one could say that the young Dickens aspired to a respectable middle-class radicalism attacking particular social evils, and ended as a middle-aged revolutionary with a peculiar hostility to the middle classes. Such an evolution in a man not given to intellectual self-analysis inevitably produced ambiguities in his portrayal of every social class at one time or another. And in no group of characters is this unconscious evolution with its accompanying contradictions more clearly displayed than in the young men who stand at the heroic centre of his books. This uneven course in his social opinions, now veering, now tacking, yet, for all its changes, moving in one final direction, affected his attitude to the future and to the past, to all classes, to education, to money, to ambition, to work, to play, to conformity, and to rebellion. This strange and complex pattern of life may be observed working out in various ways among his heroes and heroines.

Any account of Dickens must start with *Pickwick Papers*, the novel which announces an age of innocence before the course has begun. Perhaps Dickens never produced so satisfactory a hero as Mr. Pickwick again—a man, who like his author, imperceptibly changes; but not from hope to despair, rather from nullity to positive goodness. None of the problems of Dickens are met in this book: Mr. Pickwick developed in the garden of Eden before the fall, the next step from him was to Oliver and Nell—children, at least, have their measure of original sin. Yet no article on

Dickens's heroes should fail to salute the perfection of Mr. Pickwick before it goes on to the real story.

Apart from the children, the first group of heroes may be seen leading up to the self portrait of David Copperfield. Like Mr. Pickwick, this 'walking gentleman', genteel hero group begins in near nullity: one cannot discuss Harry Mayley or Edward Chester, for they are not there. Nicholas and Martin advance us a few steps: they are haters of hypocrisy, cant, and cruelty; sharp tongued and humorous; hot-tempered; inclined to selfishness; a bit weak and spoilt; pale reflections, with their eye for the absurd, of the uninstrospective young Dickens as he saw himself. Martin, with Jonas and Chevy Slyme for his relations, can hardly claim gentility; but Nicholas is a born gentleman of a somewhat ill-defined kind, although his uncle is a money-lender. The young socially unsure Dickens had need not only of false gentility and of hatred of the aristocracy, he needed also a suffused and vague love of the past—a mark of the genteel. So Nicholas's first act, when he became a rich and prosperous merchant, was to buy his father's 'old house . . . none of the old rooms were ever pulled down, no old tree was ever rooted up, nothing with which there was any association of bygone times was ever removed or changed'.

It is something of the same undefined traditional gentility which so endears to David Copperfield Dr. Strong's vaguely traditional old school and the aroma of scholarship given off by his improbable dictionary. David is the culmination, in fact, of these purely genteel heroes for whom Pip was later to atone. Of course, being a self-portrait, he has more life, but, after childhood, it's a feeble ray. To begin with, who can believe that he is a novelist? Indeed, although he is said to be a model of hard work, we never have any sense of it except in his learning shorthand. Dickens was far too extrovert in those days to analyse the qualities in himself that made for his genius. It is notable that David is no more than 'advanced in fame and fortune', where Dickens was advanced in literary skill and imaginative power. It is also notable that after childhood, nothing happened to David himself except the passion

of his love for Dora and the shock of her death—and these, which should be poignant, are somehow made less by being smiled back upon through the tears as part of youth's folly and life's pageant. *David Copperfield* is technically a very fine novel of the sentimental education genre, but the mood of mellow, wise reflection is surely too easily held; and, when we think of Dickens's age at the time of its writing, held all too prematurely. 'Advanced in fortune and fame', as a result, has inevitably a smug sound, and 'my domestic joy was perfect' seems to demand the Nemesis that was to come in real life.

Nor is this smug, genteel, conformist quality of David helped by Agnes. A successful novelist guided by her 'deep wisdom' would surely become a smug, insensitive, comfortable old best seller of the worst kind. Agnes, indeed, is the first of the group of heroines who mark the least pleasing, most frumpy and smug vision of ideal womanhood that he produced. Agnes, in fact, is betrayed by Esther Summerson, when Dickens in his next book so unwisely decided to speak through his heroine's voice. It is not surprising that this wise, womanly, housekeeping, moralising, self-congratulating, busy little creature should have needed a good dose of childlikeness, a dose of Little Nell to keep her going when she reappears as Little Dorrit. If we cannot believe in the child-woman Little Dorrit, at least we are not worried as we are by Agnes or Esther Summerson about her complete lack of a physical body—a deficiency so great that Esther's smallpox-spoilt face jars us because she has no body upon which a head could rest.

But if nothing happens to David himself after Mr. Murdstone goes off the scene, something does happen in the novel, about which David (Dickens) uses language that suggests that there lies the real drama—as well he may, for with Steerforth's seduction of Em'ly, and indeed with Steerforth himself, we are at the beginning of all those twists and turns by which Dickens eventually transforms a somewhat stagey villain into a new sort of full-sized hero. From Steerforth to Eugene Wrayburn is the road of self-discovery. Of all the would-be seducers in Dickens's novels, James Steerforth alone gets his prey; yet he is the only one, until Wrayburn, whom

Dickens seems to have wished to redeem. If we look at the facts of Steerforth's character, it may be difficult to see why. From the moment that he so revoltingly gets Mr. Mell dismissed at Creakle's school until his carefully planned seduction of Em'ly he *does* nothing to commend himself. Yet David (and surely Dickens) uses language that would save if it could—'But he slept—let me think of him so again—as I had often seen him sleep at school; and thus, in this silent hour I left him. Never more, oh God forgive you, Steerforth, to touch that passive hand in love and friendship. Never, never more!' . . . 'Yes, Steerforth, long removed from the scenes of this poor history! My sorrow may bear involuntary witness against you at the Judgement Throne; but my angry thoughts or reproaches never will, I know.' And at the last—'among the ruins of the home he had wronged, I saw him lying with his hand upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school'. If Dickens could have redeemed Steerforth he surely would have done so. And, indeed, he did; for Eugene Wrayburn is as much a redemption of Steerforth as Pip is a scapegoat for the falsities in David. On the whole, as I suggest, redemption through Wrayburn is a somewhat arbitrary business; but before that redemption came about, the figure of Steerforth had suffered under many guises and, in the course of his translation to hero, had borne witness to many changes in Dickens's social and moral outlook, had even assisted in the birth of a heroine more adequate to Dickens's mature outlook than either Little Nell or Agnes, or indeed the strange hybrid figure of Little Dorrit.

To trace these changes we should perhaps go back before Steerforth to earlier seductions in the novels. At the start the seducer is a cynical rake or libertine—John Chester or Sir Mulberry Hawk. He stands full square for the aristocratic dandy whom the middle-class radical Dickens detests as the source of out dated arbitrary power. Yet we have only to look at Boz in his early pictures to see the beringed and ringleted dandy—or is it the 'gent'? Dick Swiveller is kindly treated. In his adolescence surely it was among the would-be swells of Dick Swiveller's world that Dickens moved—the direct butt, no doubt, of any real

dandy's contempt and laughter. The seducer, then, up to *Dombey*, is a crude class symbol.

Dombey and Son brings us further forward. Carker has some genuine sensuality, of the cold, calculating, rather epicene imitation-Byron kind that the early nineteenth century must often have bred. True, he is vulgar, hypocritical, and apparently subservient—but then, unlike Steerforth, he has to scheme and work for his living. Like Steerforth, his Byronic professional seducing spills over into other sorts of pleasure loving—a somewhat ornately comfortable villa. There are four things in which Steerforth differs from him, apart from age: Steerforth despises the world, he puts other values above work, he sometimes wishes that he was not wasting his life, he has the vestige of a power to love or at any rate to want to be loved. It is not very much luggage, yet it proves enough to make the long journey to Eugene Wrayburn. Carker fails in his seduction, but then in Edith Dombey he has a much more difficult job than little Em'ly presents to Steerforth. There were two roads open for the Dickensian seducer—glamour (it was presumably this that Steerforth used, though little Em'ly's last note to Peggotty shows small evidence that she has felt it) or boredom. Boredom and self-distaste, these were the marks of the woman who had already sold herself into loveless marriage—Edith, Louisa Bounderby, Honoria Dedlock, if she had not already been seduced before the novel began. Pride saves Edith Dombey; pride would have saved Lady Dedlock; pride and an instinct of self-preservation save Louisa. Yet it is hardly a fair contest—Mr. Carker emits his faint ray of vulgar sensuality, James Harthouse his rather superior brand of Steerforth's worldly charm. But, if it only takes one to make a rape, it takes two to make a seduction; and there is nothing in Edith or Louisa to respond. They are looking for flight from a desperate situation and indeed they take it; but they are not looking for any species of sexual love. The female equivalent to the sort of professional minor Byronism that Steerforth and Harthouse and Gowan, no doubt, in his relations with Miss Wade, offer, is the minor, rather half-hearted coquetry that is touched on

in Dolly Varden, punished in Fanny Dorrit and Estella, and finally redeemed in Bella Wilfer. But Estella and Bella are more than coquettes, they are proud, frozen, unhappy women anxious to be free of desperate homes, they combine in fact the nearest approach that Dickens gets to a sensually alive woman with the proud cold beauties—Edith, Louisa, and Honoria. *Our Mutual Friend*, in fact, contains the most developed hero and the most developed heroine in Dickens's fiction. The one has come a long journey from the seducer-villain; and the other, almost as long a journey from the coquette and the runaway wife. Even so they remain separate, each is reclaimed by a nullity, John Harmon and Lizzie Hexam. Yet in them Dickens has admitted to the saved a degree of sexual reality that argues well for the future.

We may leave Bella on one side; she has brought some frailty, some liveliness and some sexual warmth to Dickens's heroines; but she plays little part in the evolution of Dickens's social or moral outlook—it was not a woman's role to do so.

Eugene Wrayburn is a far more interesting case. His salvation is really immensely arbitrary. Even after he has left Lizzie for the last time before Headstone's murderous attack, he has not given up his ideas of seduction entirely—his father's voice tells him, 'You wouldn't marry for some money and some station, because you were frightfully likely to become bored. Are you less frightfully likely to become bored marrying for no money and no station?' It is indeed his rival's blows that save him. Yet we have seen that Steerforth had certain pleas to offer; Wrayburn offers all the same pleas and by this time they have become more urgent to Dickens. First, contempt for the World and for success—this, once a hidden admiration, is now the centre of Dickens's moral values. Private income, public school and university education, all these may be forgiven if they produce a despiser of bourgeois society. Dandy insolence, once the mark of an arbitrary, outdated order is now the badge of rejection of Podsnap. Other values above work and duty? This has been amply confirmed by a rather separate but very successful hero, the sad, Calvinist-destroyed Clennam. Then the vestige of regret for a wasted life has gone

through many fires since Steerforth's day; it has been purified by Richard Carstone and above all by Sidney Carton, whom Shrewsbury, gentlemanly bohemianism, and the Bar could not entirely destroy. Above all the need for love has also been through Carton's fire so that Lucie can say to Darnay, 'remember how strong we are in our happiness, and how weak he is in his misery'. Loneliness, failure, pride, bitter rejection of all that made up Victorian progress and Victorian morality, a considered rejection of duty and hard work as moral ends, Dickens comes through to acceptance of these in the person of Eugene Wrayburn. And sensuality? Does he also redeem his own strong sensuality? This, I think, is less certain. The thin, calculated sensuality that runs from the Byronic Steerforth to the Yellow Book Wrayburn is not surely of the obsessive, tortured kind that we suspect in Dickens. Does not this real sensuality peep through in more sinister places? In Pecksniff's scene with Mary Graham, in Jonas's wooing of Mercy, in Uriah's glances at Agnes—there is more real lust there than in all the wiles of Steerforth and Harthouse, in all the brutalities of Gowan. And now the lust comes up again on the wrong side, in slavery to the Victorian doctrines of hard work, of fact, of ambition and of self-betterment—all things that had played a large part in Dickens's own life and which he had now rejected. The obsessive lust of Bradley Headstone finds no redemption. Yet as he rolls on the ground, after Charlie Hexam has left him, I believe that Dickens feels as strong a pity for him as David had felt for Steerforth. Would Dickens perhaps have left from here on another long pilgrimage deep into the holy places of his own soul? Can Jasper be the next strange step in that new pilgrimage?

Some Observations on the Language of Dickens

RANDOLPH QUIRK

ONE scarcely needs to be reminded that the language of Dickens was long held in very poor esteem and that indeed it is still so held in many quarters. Its tendency to be sentimental was noticed as early as 1839 in the *Quarterly Review*, where Dickens was also accused of using 'mawkish, far-fetched verbiage'. While Lord Melbourne deplored 'that low debasing style', Swinburne condemned it as bookish and stagey; Arnold Bennett felt that Dickens had 'no feeling for words', and George Saintsbury was appalled by his 'disgusting rant'. Many have regarded as his most serious defect an undeniable tendency to be melodramatic and to indulge in a rather embarrassing poetic prose such as that describing the death of Little Nell. Many again have been offended by his equally undeniable lapses into a dull, turgid expository prose, unrelieved by imagination or any consideration of 'fit' with the character using it: one might instance especially the 'unravelling' passages towards the end of his novels—Flintwinch's long speech to this purpose in Ch. 30 of *Little Dorrit*, for example. Most of us would accept, too, that his innocent characters often speak an intolerably self-complacent, even pompous English, that the novelist's own persona is often ranting or sentimental, that death speeches are more virtuously poignant than realistic.

Yet it is timely as well as more rewarding to look at the credit side of Dickens's language. It was more admired than dispraised by his contemporaries: even the climax of *The Old Curiosity Shop* was so effective that we are told of New Yorkers lining the quayside at the approach of the English boat and calling across to those

on board, 'Is Little Nell dead?' Nor was the *Quarterly Review* by any means always hostile. In 1837, a reviewer of *Pickwick* extolled Dickens's 'felicity in working up the. . . unadulterated vernacular idioms of the lower classes in London', and in 1839 the journal again praised this aspect of Dickens's talent: 'Boz is regius professor of slang, that expression of the mother-wit, the low humour of the lower classes, their Sanskrit, their hitherto unknown tongue.' This—be it noted—was written of *Oliver Twist*, the book whose manifestations of slang have been most criticised by recent writers precisely for lack of realism: the book which contains the 'improbable oaths' of Sikes and Fagin. The reviewer in the *Quarterly* is in fact more sophisticated than some modern critics in saying that the characters speak as they ought 'with every appearance of truth' and in approving the way Dickens makes Bill Sikes appear to be 'swearing "words that burn" ' when in fact he is 'wrapping up this hero—brimstone in silver paper' and using a cunning 'dilution of humorous periphrases'. The 1839 reviewer, it would seem, has acutely perceived and been able to share Dickens's own attitude to linguistic realism. He wanted, as he himself says in the Preface to *Oliver Twist*, to convey the true flavour of low idiom without letting the language become actually offensive to the reader—as in 'reality' this speech undoubtedly would be. A recent critic, Monroe Engel, quotes a letter from Dickens to a lady-contributor to *Household Words* in which he criticises her for writing a slang which is simply a transcript of speech and which has not been through the artistic process of being rendered expressive for the purpose in hand.[1]

We may come nearer to a sympathetic appreciation of Dickens's language if we consider it under four heads: his use of language for individualisation and for typification; his use of it structurally; and his use of it experimentally.

On the first of these, little need be said; particular locutions and systems of grammar to individualise his characters are striking, almost to the point of obtrusiveness. Indeed, the use of this

[1] *The Maturity of Dickens*, Cambridge, Mass., 1959, p. 18.

well-established dramatic device was an obvious desideratum to a writer who worked by means of serial publication, since it provided the reader with a most immediate means of recall and identification. As in life, so in Dickens's art, speech is an integral part of the personality of each character and a part which we recognise each time he or she appears. Sometimes, linguistic identification is particularly dominant, as for instance with Sam Weller and Mrs. Gamp; in fact, comparison of Mrs. Gamp's speeches throughout *Chuzzlewit* shows an increasing density of identifying features, indicating an increased interest in this aspect of the lady on the part of author and public alike, and preparing us for her eventual abstraction from the novel to become the central figure in one of his best-known 'Readings'. More generally, however, linguistic individualisation is small, and is frequently made through a favourite phrase or some peculiarity of pronunciation or grammar:

> 'Well, Sir,' said Mrs. Plornish, a civil woman, 'not to deceive you, he's gone to look for a job'.
> Not to deceive you, was a method of speech with Mrs. Plornish. She would deceive you, under any circumstances, as little as might be; but she had a trick of answering in this provisional form.
>
> (*Little Dorrit*, Ch. 12.)

More important to Dickens than individualising, however, was the urge to express a regional, social, occupational, or philosophical typification by language. A character's occupation and way of life colour his language as they affect other aspects of his behaviour also, and from his earliest writings we find Dickens assembling an armoury of jargon for imparting this colour. We have theatrical slang in the *Sketches*; the habits of parliamentary language mark characters in the *Sketches* and later in *Copperfield*; there is the circus jargon in *Hard Times*. The speedy effect of experience upon language is illustrated sardonically in *American Notes* with the reference to the newly embarked passengers ' "turning-in"—no sailor of seven hours' experience talks of going to bed'. (Ch. 2) By contrast, the speech of Captain Cuttle in *Dombey and Son* shows the deep impression of a life spent in seafaring. Imagery drawn

from occupation is made integral to Cuttle's thinking, and the same is true of Mr. Toodle, the railway man:

'If you find yourselves in cuttings or in tunnels, don't you play no secret games. Keep your whistles going, and let's know where you are.'
'But what makes you say this along of Rob, father?' asked his wife, anxiously.
'Polly, old 'ooman,' said Mr. Toodle, 'I don't know as I said it partikler along o' Rob, I'm sure. I starts light with Rob only; I comes to a branch; I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him, afore I knows where I am, or where they comes from. What a junction a man's thoughts is!'

(*Dombey and Son*, Ch. 38.)

Railway imagery became, indeed, a favourite medium with Dickens, especially (as in this example) as an exponent of another favourite notion, association of ideas; we may recall that the mind of Mrs. General in *Dorrit* 'had a little circular set of mental grooves or rails, on which she started little trains of other people's opinions'. (Ch. 38)

The individualisation mentioned earlier is usually made congruent with the kinds of typification now being discussed. Thus the features comically individualising Mrs. Plornish stratify her morally as well. The fawning, insincere references to humility by Uriah Heep in *Copperfield*, and the similar manifestations of Carker in *Dombey*, mirror the fawning insincerity of their characters. The twisted syntax and images of Flintwinch in *Dorrit* are again typical manifestations of his twisted mind and are congruent with his twisted physique. On the other hand, virtue shines through the pure and obviously sanctioned lexis and syntax of Oliver Twist or of Lizzie Hexam in *Our Mutual Friend*, despite the social neglect, poor education and appalling environment endured by these characters, reminding us again that Dickens is not striving after a simple or slavish linguistic realism but after a linguistic congruence with fundamental intention.

A third use of language by Dickens I have called 'structural', and by this metaphor I refer to language functioning rather in a representational than in a descriptive fashion. I have discussed instances of this elsewhere;[1] the present participles and present

[1] *Charles Dickens and Appropriate Language*, Durham 1959, pp. 9ff.

tenses at the opening of *Bleak House*, the systematic, periodic use of the historic present in *Copperfield*, an analogous usage in *Our Mutual Friend*, and the almost rhythmic alternation between present and past for narrative in *Edwin Drood*. But in addition to major features reinforcing major themes in this way, one finds such structural use of language again and again on a smaller scale for specific, individual purposes. A lexical instance occurs in *Great Expectations* where the novelist's equivocation, thematically necessary to be sustained at this point, has as its vehicle a matching lexical equivocation:

> I saw in this, wretched though it made me . . . I saw in this that Estella was set to wreak Miss Haversham's revenge on men, and that she was not to be given to me until she had gratified it for a term. I saw in this a reason for her being beforehand assigned to me . . . I saw in this . . . (Ch. 38)

Pip indeed *sees* in the event all that he says: but his experience leads him (and the reader) to believe that what he sees is correct: in other words, to Pip seeing is knowing, and the book's theme is to show that seeing is *not* knowing. If the author had used the verb Know ('I knew from this'), it would not have been true for Pip and it would have expressly misled the reader. If Pip had said 'I concluded from this', it would not only have given the game away so far as the reader was concerned but would have been out of character in attributing to Pip a naturely sceptical awareness of his world and of his own most grievous limitation. *Saw* is thus both pivotal and structural.

The following passage provides another instance of language as direct structural representation:

> Dora is rather difficult to—I would not, for the world, say, to rely upon, because she is the soul of purity and truth—but rather difficult to—I hardly know how to express it, really, Agnes. (*David Copperfield*, Ch. 39.)

David's reluctant, half-formed doubts about Dora are made explicit in their very half-formedness, and we are given a glimpse of the nearest he can come to precision in his vigorous repudiation of *rely upon*, rightly but confusedly repudiated because *rely upon* connotes for David aspects of reliability which he knows to be out of the question and indeed irrelevant.

All three of the uses of language touched upon so far are three aspects of one thing—Dickens's wish to achieve a multi-functional mode of expression, and it was in the interest of developing multi-functional language that he made his most important experiments. One device with which he experimented successfully almost throughout his literary career is that lively form of presentation which Charles Bally in his classic article called 'le style indirect libre' and which in German is called 'erlebte Rede'.[1] Dickens found that this could give him the speed and economy of narrative, as well as potential colouring to suggest (*a*) the characteristic idiom of a particular character, (*b*) the unspoken reflection of a character, again in terms of his own idiom, and (*c*) the impact of one character upon another without either the clumsiness of explanation or the delay and cumbersome loss of continuity that would be entailed if this were done by making the second speak his reaction. All facets of his potentiality are admirably illustrated in the eleventh chapter of *Bleak House* where there is an episode that is almost certainly based upon a report in the *Household Narrative* of an Alderman interrogating a fourteen-year-old boy called George Ruby who was called as a witness in an assault action:

> Alderman Humphrey: Well, do you know what you are about? Do you know what an oath is? Boy: No. Alderman: Can you read? Boy: No. Alderman: Do you ever say your prayers? Boy: No, never. Alderman: Do you know what prayers are? Boy: No. Alderman: Do you know what God is? Boy: No. Alderman: Do you know what the devil is? Boy: I've heard of the devil, but I don't know him. Alderman: What do you know? Boy: I knows how to sweep the crossings. Alderman: And that's all? Boy: That's all. I sweeps a crossing.
>
> (*The Household Narrative*, January 1850, p.7.)

This dull report, rudimentarily enlivened only by distinguishing the boy's speech with a trace of substandard conjugation, is in sharp contrast with the *Bleak House* episode, which is presented entirely by means of *erlebte Rede*:

> . . . the boy that sweeps the crossing . . . would tell you . . .
> Says the Coroner, is that boy here? . . .

[1] See *Charles Dickens and Appropriate Language*, pp. 23ff. and references.

Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heard of sich a think.

Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for *him*. *He* don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. He can't spell it. No father, no mother, no friends. Never been to school. What's home? Knows a broom's a broom, and knows that it's wicked to tell a lie. Don't recollect who told him about the broom, or about the lie, but knows both.

(*Bleak House*, Ch. 11.)

We have a vivid dramatisation of Jo and an imaginative rendering of his language but transmuted to a report which lets us share the Coroner's reaction to his words (contrast 'Never heard of sich a think' with 'Don't know that everybody has two names'), and which also perhaps echoes the muttering of the clerk of the court who is entering the deposition ('No father, no mother, no friends.').[1]

Not that *erlebte Rede* was Dickens's only device for expressing the complexities and simultaneities of consciousness. Dame Una Pope-Hennessy observes that Flora Finching's idiosyncratic speech in *Dorrit* anticipates the more recent 'stream of consciousness' technique. Some of Dickens's minor writings show his tackling experiments in this direction rather more radically and to a more sustained degree than he does in the case of Flora; one may consider, for instance, the following:

I am an old woman now and my good looks are gone but that's me my dear over the plate-warmer and considered like in the times when you used to pay two guineas on ivory and took your chance pretty much how you came out, which made you very careful how you left it about afterwards because people were turned so red and uncomfortable by mostly guessing it was somebody else quite different, and there was once a certain person that put his money in

[1]Despite the obvious differences, it would seem that Humphry House's suggestion (*The Dickens World*, London 1941, pp. 32f.) that the passages are cognate is perfectly sound. On p. 3 of the same issue of the *Household Narrative* there are Dickensian editorial comments on the incident as witnessing the 'startling depths of mental ignorance and neglect concealed beneath our hollow shows of civilisation'; the editorial deplores the magistrate's rejection of the boy's evidence 'as that of a creature who knew nothing whatever of the obligation to tell the truth', when it should have been obvious that for all the lad's terrible ignorance he was completely unable 'to speak other than the truth'. So too in the *Bleak House* episode, Dickens stresses Jo's unswerving truthfulness and makes the coroner's rejection of his evidence preposterous by giving as the grounds that the boy 'can't exactly say' what will happen to him 'after he's dead'.

a hop business that came in one morning to pay his rent and respects being the second floor that would have taken it down from its hook and put it in his breast pocket—you understand my dear—for the L, he says of the original—only there was no mellowness in *his* voice and I couldn't let him, but his opinion of it you may gather from his saying to it 'Speak to me Emma!' which was far from a rational observation no doubt but still a tribute to its being a likeness, and I think myself it *was* like me when I was young and wore that sort of stays.

(*Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*, Ch. 1.)

One finds the same kind of interest at work in the numerous attempts that Dickens makes to show in a character's speech the inter-action of personality and experience, a matter which seems to have been of particular fascination for Dickens if the experience itself is verbal. On two occasions, for instance, he demonstrates the impression made on the unsophisticated mind by a piece of commemorative verse. In Ch. 39 of *Dombey*, Captain Cuttle says of the missing Walter: ' "Affliction sore, long time he bore, and let us overhaul the wollume, and there find it." "Physicians", observed Bunsby, "was in vain".' In Ch. 2 of *Copperfield*, David as a boy in church ponders a monument and tries to think 'what the feelings of Mrs. Bodgers must have been when affliction sore, long time Mr. Bodgers bore, and physicians were in vain'. He wonders whether they called in the local physician 'Mr. Chillip, and he was in vain; and if so, how he likes to be reminded of it once a week'.

The inter-action of personality with linguistic experience and physical experience is admirably demonstrated in Ch. 18 of *The Uncommerical Traveller*, where the anxious traveller's mind is displayed in simultaneous reaction to a rough night crossing of the English Channel and to the words of a popular song. The effect very much depends on the contemporary reader's being no doubt thoroughly familiar with the words of the song, and since this degree of familiarity may not be omnipresent today, it is perhaps worth quoting the relevant stanzas as written by the indefatigable author of 'The Minstrel Boy', 'The Last Rose of Summer', 'Believe me if All Those Endearing Young Charms', and other pieces which wrung the heart of the mid-nineteenth century:

Rich and rare were the gems she wore,
And a bright gold ring on her wand she bore;
But Oh her beauty was far beyond
Her sparkling gems or snow white wand.

Lady! dost thou not fear to stray
So lone and lovely through this bleak way?
Are Erin's sons so good or so cold
As not to be tempted by woman or gold?

Sir Knight, I fear not the least alarm,
No son of Erin will offer me harm;
For though they love woman and golden store,
Sir Knight, they love Honour and Virtue more.

(From *Irish Melodies*, by Thomas Moore.)

One may now consider the way this is woven into the traveller's experience and takes on a comically transmuted form in his consciousness:

The wind blows stiffly from the Nor'-East, the sea runs high, we ship a deal of water . . . I am under a curious compulsion to occupy myself with the Irish melodies . . . 'Rich and rare were the ge-ems she-e-e-e wore, And a bright gold ring on her wa-and she bo-ore, But O her beauty was fa-a-a—a-r beyond' —I am particularly proud of my execution here, when I become aware of another awkward shock from the sea . . . 'Her sparkling gems, or snow-white wand, But O her beauty was fa-a-a-a-a-r beyond'—another awkward one here . . . 'Her spa-a-rkling ge-ems or her Port! port! steady! steady! snow-white fellow-creature at the paddle-box very selfishly audible, bump, roar, wash, white wand.'

As my execution of the Irish melodies partakes of my imperfect perceptions of what is going on around me, so what is going on around me becomes something else than what it is . . . Still, through all this, I must ask her (who *was* she I wonder!) for the fiftieth time and without ever stopping, Does she not fear to stray, So lone and lovely through this bleak way, And are Erin's sons so good or so cold, As not to be tempted by more fellow-creatures at the paddle-box or gold? Sir Knight I feel not the least alarm, No son of Erin will offer me harm, For though they love fellow-creature with umbrella down again and golden store, Sir Knight they what a tremendous one love honour and virtue more: For though they love Stewards with a bull's eye bright, they'll trouble you for your ticket, sir—rough passage to-night!

(*The Uncommercial Traveller*, Ch. 18.)

In this example of Dickens's multifunctional language, it is noteworthy how difficult it is to label the amalgam of expository modes that it constitutes. We have in the first place some fairly simple narrative which described the physical world ('The wind blows') and its impact upon the narrator ('I am under a strange compulsion'). The use of the historic present for this aids the bold juxtaposition of internal monologue ('Sir Knight they what a tremendous one'). But the stages of manifesting consciousness do not end with internal monologue; Dickens uses a reflexive device by which we are given not merely the impressions generated by the narrator's consciousness ('snow-white fellow-creature . . . very selfishly audible') but also, as though indistinguishable from these, utterances from the outside world as they impinge upon the narrator's consciousness: 'though they love Stewards with a bull's eye bright, they'll trouble you for your ticket, sir—rough passage tonight.' The song, which at first maintains its identity and keeps its linguistic distance with the help of quotation marks, soon becomes disturbed by interruptions, though the persistence of the quotation marks represent the traveller's struggle to keep it distinct; presently, however, the song and the rest of consciousness become indistinguishable, and indeed the song imposes its pattern on the whole experience, as we see in the rhyme and metre of the concluding lines quoted. As in the passage quoted earlier from *Bleak House*, we see the many-layered, many-faceted language economically transmuting both experience and consciousness into a whole which is rich with suggestion.

A French View of Dickens's Humour

SYLVÈRE MONOD

ALTHOUGH the French, as a nation, are so notoriously deficient in humour, the situation of a Frenchman discussing Dickens's humour is not without its advantages. For instance, the comparative dearth of humorists in French literature has enabled the critics of my country to concentrate on the intellectual analysis of humour with a degree of detachment that it would perhaps be difficult to achieve in England. So I propose to deal with Dickens's humour, not in the light of the classical theories put forward by Mr. J. B. Priestley and other English commentators, but rather in that of a definition coined by a French analyst. Professor Louis Cazamian, while discussing the humour of Sir Walter Scott, wrote in his *History of English Literature:*

> At this degree of superior concentration, humour acts as a kind of twofold wisdom, blending, correcting, and especially relieving, the one by means of the other, the bitterness of clear discernment and the sweetness of charity.

Even so, Dickens's humour remains an awe-inspiring theme, both on account of its size and of its elusive character. Unlike Dickens's *mind*, another possible subject for fruitful reflection, Dickens's humour does at any rate obviously exist. A certain proportion of Dickensian criticism has been conducted on the lines of what one might call the *had-no and only* method; thus, it has long been fashionable to say that Dickens had no style, only mannerisms, no psychology, only characterisation (or caricature), no passion, only melodrama, no message (or philosophy of life), only platitudes, no feelings, only sentimentality (or bathos), no culture, only vulgar curiosity, and, of course, no mind, only instincts.

At any rate, Dickens's humour is definitely not one of his "*had-noes*", but probably his most obvious *had*.

Obvious as the existence of humour is in Dickens's writings, this humour is not easily isolated or defined. It is in this respect perhaps not unlike Mrs. Wilfer's under-petticoat in *Our Mutual Friend*. The following fragment of conversation will at once provide a somewhat crude, though I think irresistible, specimen of Dickens's humour, and explain in what sense I speak of the analogy:[1]

—Why one should go out to dine with one's own daughter or sister, as if one's underpetticoat was a blackboard, I do *not* understand.
—Neither do I understand, retorted Mrs. Wilfer, with deep scorn, how a young lady can mention the garment in the name of which you have indulged. I blush for you.
—Thank you, Ma, said Lavvy, yawning, but I can do it for myself, I am obliged to you, when there's any occasion.
Here Mr. Sampson, with the view of establishing harmony, which he never under any circumstances succeeded in doing, said with an agreeable smile: 'After all, you know, ma'am, we know it's there.' And immediately felt that he had committed himself.
—We know it's there! said Mrs. Wilfer, glaring.

Now, of Dickens's humour, as of Mrs. Wilfer's underpetticoat, we can say that 'we know it's there'. But, unlike the underpetticoat, we cannot leave it 'there'.

Whatever one means by humour, the questions that arise in connection with Dickens are not, of course, whether he makes us laugh—he does; that is the underpetticoat the existence of which we are taking for granted—but three other questions: (1) whether the fun of Dickens is always worthy of the name of humour; (2) how (in so far as this can be ascertained) he does make us laugh; (3) and, finally, whether Dickens's humour has any ultimate meaning, conveys a message (however much he himself would have hated this way of phrasing it) or, in other words, whether there is in this humour the wisdom that is one of the requisites of all real humour.

[1]Book IV, ch. 16; Miss Lavinia has just charged her mother with undue, and unnecessary, stiffness.

'I think your pathos is better than your fun', said G. H. Lewes to George Eliot; but Lewes, it seems to me, must have meant humour, for the two words are not interchangeable; yet although there is, even in George Eliot's novels, a good deal of fun that scarcely rises to the level of humour proper, this necessary distinction need not involve a supercilious attitude to all non-humorous forms of fun, many of which are indeed perfectly legitimate and often delightfully refreshing.

As far as Dickens himself is concerned, however, his inborn tendency to see the funny side of things or to make fun of them did not, invariably, produce humour of the most characteristic and unmistakable kind. The animal spirits, so to speak, that are made so abundantly evident in many of his letters or in his recorded conversations, and that were conducive, as often as not, to mere horseplay, did not preclude, especially in the last twenty years or so of his life, a tenseness and even harshness often painful to contemplate. In his published writings, it would appear that the humorous perception of reality and outlook on life existed from the first, but also, that, while in his earlier tales (*Pickwick* and even the *Sketches by Boz*) he gave free vent to his buoyancy or ebullience, it was only gradually that he came to realise the more or less philosophical implications of her attitudes and findings. In other words, Dickens had his humour in him from the start, but only gradually formed an idea of what it meant. So that the manifestations of Dickens's comic spirit not seldom fall into categories widely different from what I think ought alone to be regarded as humour.

There is a large group of episodes, or passages, or isolated dicta, that must be called infra-humorous: they will be found in books like *Oliver Twist* or *Barnaby Rudge*. Even *Pickwick*, with all its manifold delights, is uneven; and it is perhaps significant that it does not go down too well with the French reading public, especially with that portion of it who have little or no knowledge of the English language or of things English in general. *Pickwick*, I grieve to say, is not a popular book in my country; and even a cultured intellectual like André Gide could write of Dickens: 'Il

ne m'amuse pas du tout dans *Pickwick*' (he doesn't amuse me at all in *Pickwick*). I cannot say that I envy the type of mind that can be unamused by the trial-scene or by some of Sam's anecdotes; I cannot even claim that I understand the workings of such a mind. But Gide's regal—or queenly—way of being 'not amused' by *Pickwick* may be due to his boggling at some of the inserted tales, at some ponderous jollity or laboured irony, and even at some repetitive or over-systematic comicalities, not always of the first order.

Even when Dickens's fun does not thus fall below its most characteristic level, it has other ways of being sometimes entirely different from humour proper; thus in his satire, especially in the political field, bitterness occasionally has the upper hand of charity. Humour is there, undoubtedly, but not alone, nor perhaps principally. The aggressiveness of Dickens's famous speech against Palmerston (delivered at Drury Lane on 25 June 1855) is most uncharitable. We might almost say the same about some chapters of *Little Dorrit*; yet in the best-known of all, ch. X of Book I, 'Containing', the title says, 'the Whole Science of Government', and describing the Art of Not Doing It, the truly humorous (the points at which the author is himself amused, and thoroughly enjoys himself) is less easily sorted out from the element of anger and fierceness that is destructive of humour.

Finally there are, especially in *Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, many passages in which it is possible to discern something which is not humour proper, but which is not below it, nor entirely different from it in kind. What I have in mind is, if anything, above humour,[1] pages in which there is a close alliance of comicality and sadness, and also what we might call a quality of poetry, fully justifying Swinburne's belief that Dickens was one of the greatest comic poets that ever gladdened the life of men.

But although Dickens's comic spirit assumes almost inexhaustibly varied and complex forms, it is not my purpose to discuss its more exceptional or marginal aspects; and I now propose to

[1]Like David Copperfield's account of his attempts to 'form Dora's mind'. (ch. XLVIII).

concentrate on what happens when Dickens *is* really and indubitably humorous.

How, then, does Dickens as a humorist make us laugh? The question may appear rather idle, not to say silly, and it is only too obvious that it can be answered, at best, very partially. One thing we can do, however, is to list a number of processes or techniques about which there can be general agreement that they are part and parcel of Dickens's humour.

In the first place, I suppose most readers would say that Dickens makes us laugh by creating comic characters. The connection between that kind of humour and the humours of the Jonsonian comedy is a well-worn commonplace of literary criticism. Still, it is one that wears relatively well, and it is a point that need not be laboured in the present essay. A tentative definition of Dickens's humour through characterisation might be that it is something we get whenever a character makes us laugh by being himself or —shall I say, more often?—herself. He or she has been clearly placed before us, once for all, and need not do anything in particular, except go on.

In a second category there are a certain number of themes to which Dickens's humour attaches itself with uncommon pertinacity. Out of many themes, there are three that are most illuminating: domestic servants, inadequate theatrical performances, and funerals. With funerals, Dickens had no more personal connection than everyone of us has who must attend an increasing number of those ceremonies as he goes through life, and who is led to expect that normally he himself will be buried one day, or any day, since, as Marcel Proust has it: 'we, the living, are but dead people who have not yet come into office.' Yet, the persistence with which the theme appears again and again through the novels is striking: from Mr. Sowerberry in *Oliver Twist*, to Mr. Mould in *Chuzzlewit*, or to Omer and Joram in *Copperfield*, the jollities of the funereal trade are harped upon with grim relish. And, although in *Our Mutual Friend* and *Edwin Drood*, corpses are rather angled for or effaced than committed to the earth, there are satirical references as late as in *Great Expectations*.

The humour of domesticalities might easily enough be traced back to Dickens's unconscious obsession with his own ancestry, if one wished to travel along that line of criticism and analysis. Such cannot be my present purpose. But one point is of more relevant interest: all this plethoric branch of Dickensian humour boils down to one simple statement—that in the relationship between master and servant the real psychological position is as often as not the reverse of the official one; although Mr. Pickwick is not often daunted by Sam (and how one admires him for it!) Sam does lord it over him, as the brighter intellect—and the more experienced—will usually do over the weaker; while David Copperfield lives in constant awe of Mrs. Crupp, of Littimer, and of everyone of the incapables who are supposed to be the servants of Dora; Mr. Merdle is overshadowed by a Chief Butler sitting in judgement over him, a first cousin, one would suppose, of Mr. Veneering's butler, the Analytical Chemist; finally, Pip and Herbert have come to call their page, simply, the Avenger. The source of the comic appears comparatively clear in such cases: it is merely a reversal of the accepted order of things.

As regards the theatre, the biographical connection is again obvious enough; never was writer so visibly and literally stage-struck as was Dickens. But in proportion as he admired and enjoyed good acting (including his own), he was tickled by poor acting, and again and again made fun of it. Here also, the source of the comic is not far to seek: it lies in the contrast between the greatness of the ambitions displayed and the littleness of the means and results.

Of course, besides the creation of characters and the treatment of a few favourite themes, Dickens has many other ways of making us laugh. When Dennis the hangman in *Barnaby Rudge* drops esoteric hints about his professional pursuits and about the people he has artistically 'worked off', this is akin to funereal humour; but when he joins the rioters, and thunders: 'I'm a religious man, by G—!' the source of the comic seems different. There is still a sense of contrast; also perhaps the sense that we have here a flash of unusual truth, a revelation. This piercingness of truth, this

sudden flash of revelation, is not infrequent, but it is not so easily isolated and analysed as what we have studied so far. We find a similar effect in *Bleak House*, when the young man of the name of Guppy ushers in his marriage-proposal to Esther Summerson by the statement that his mother 'is eminently calculated for a mother-in-law'. (Ch. IX)

There cannot but be always a strong basis of *observation*, of truth, at the root of all genuine humour. Even eccentricity cannot exist in the abstract. It can only be presented as a deviation from normality; the real, including its more usual aspects, must have been fully apprehended and assimilated, before the humorist can introduce his boldest variations. And that is why the word caricature ought not to be too readily applied to Dickens's humorous characterisation, even in the case of his most ludicrous eccentrics: so keen is his perception of men and things that even when a figure is reduced to two or three quaint features or gestures or phrases, they will not be gratuitous, they will much more probably be essential, they will probably be enough to convey the make-up of a fairly complete personality. It is not because such aspects are not immediately perceived by everyone that they are unimportant or insignificant.

If we now come to discuss whether Dickens's humour does convey a message, or does make sense, we see at once that it cannot but do that. But the reason why this is not generally recognised is that what sense it makes, what vision of the world it conveys, happens to be different and new. Dickens's humour indeed consists chiefly in his seeing things in a new and different light, and that its chief effect on us is to teach us—*ridendo*—to do the same in our turn.

It is particularly illuminating in this respect to compare two almost equally entertaining scenes, both involving foreigners, at either end of Dickens's career as a novelist; one is in *Pickwick* and stages the appearance of Count Smorltork at the fancy-dress breakfast of Mrs. Leo Hunter (Ch. XV); the other occurs in *Our Mutual Friend* and stages the appearance of an anonymous Frenchman at Mrs. Podsnap's dinner-party. (Book I, Ch. XI)

The purpose of the comparison is to prove that there is an intellectual substance in Dickens's humour, for the very simple reason that this intellectual substance is radically altered between 1837 and 1865; it changes, it evolves; therefore it exists.

The implication in the *Pickwick* scene is that it is ridiculous to be a foreigner—and that is perfectly true—because a foreigner speaks a foreign language, because he misunderstands words and things, seen or heard, and therefore forms absurd conclusions; again it is perfectly true that it would be preposterous for a foreigner to claim that he achieves understanding of a country other than his own, and to sit in judgement on its institutions. But the implication of the scene from *Our Mutual Friend* is exactly the reverse, and it is no less true: that it is ridiculous to laugh at foreigners because they speak a foreign language, because they misunderstand what they are told, or merely because they are different. In short, it looks as though the author of *Our Mutual Friend* were poking fraternal fun at the author of *Pickwick*; and incidentally the ability to laugh at oneself is an obvious essential of humour; perhaps it is mostly the lack of this ability that deprives the French as a nation of a sense of humour, although they are certainly ready enough to laugh at other people. In any case, it is true that the mood of the *Pickwick* scene would not have been out of place in Mr. Podsnap's drawing-room, or in Bleeding Heart Yard, whose inhabitants thought foreigners were a mistake of Providence.

It was only gradually that Dickens discovered the full value of his own humour: not merely to be funny, but to teach the truth. Of the truths he taught one is universal and far-reaching. We can discover it by going back to some of our former examples, by again fingering the same folds of Mrs. Wilfer's underpetticoat, so to speak. What lies in common between funerals, theatrical performances and awe-inspiring domestics, is surely the note of incongruity. The humorous contrasts between Mr. Wopsle and Shakespeare, or between Omar and Joram's Jaunts and Jollities and David's acute grief, or again between Mrs. Crupp's tyrannous demands and her 'master's' abject cringing, such contrasts are humorous because they so forcibly remind us of one of the oldest,

but oftenest-forgotten in practice, of all platitudinous truths, namely, that things and people are not what they seem. A very high proportion of Dickens's humour rests on this constant and illuminating perception of the discrepancy between what things are supposed to be and what they really are, between what people think about themselves—when they think at all—and the objective view of them. Dickens tirelessly aims at destroying complacency, smugness, illusion, self-deception, at ridding us also of the force of habit. His single weapon is laughter, uproarious laughter, and it is a very efficient one. The most valuable effect that an assiduous course of reading and re-reading of Dickens can have on us is that it will teach us not to regard things as normal or true merely because they are generally accepted and we have grown accustomed to them; it will teach us to call in question practically everything, and thus to achieve a truer vision of the world. This simple process is probably the same in essence as that which, with other writers, whose minds are differently constructed, results in the creation of poetry. In Dickens's fiction, at any rate, the result is *humour*.

Pecksniff is perhaps the least satisfactory illustration of this view. There is no incongruity whatsoever between his style and his personality. Indeed, Pecksniff is rather an exception, in that he knows himself; he knows himself to be a hypocrite, and practises hypocrisy systematically and conscientiously, one is almost tempted to say, honestly. Micawber, on the other hand, is a perfect example: his lazy confidence in the future and complacent expectation of recognition offer a constant contrast to his miserable shiftiness and his inability to turn an honest penny.

But the very same attitude also leads Dickens to call in question most of the values or supposed values on which Victorian society is reared. This is done sometimes rather crudely, as when the preacher at the Temperance meeting cannot preach because he is drunk, or whenever the incongruity is merely between the coat a man wears and the same man's soul. Sometimes, it is done almost poetically, as when Miss Havisham, the cloistered eccentric, sings the blacksmith's song, *Old Clem*. Often it is done with brilliancy

and gusto, as when Dickens shows that proctors are costly non-entitites, that politicians are playing an idle game, or that, in order to be called a gentleman, one may have to be most ungentle and to make oneself unworthy of the better name of man.

This notion is essential to a proper understanding of Dickens's humour, though it is is not, of course, indispensable for its real enjoyment. There is no proper way of enjoying Dickens's humour. But someone who does not enjoy it in one way or another should not make English literature his subject, any more than one who does not enjoy Shakespeare's poetry.

Horace: Odes I, XXIII

Chloe, who will not venture near,
Is like a little upland deer
That's lost her mother and finds in every
Gust in the branches a cause of fear:

Whether the spring-announcing breeze
Shudders the foliage, or she sees
A green lizard twitch a bramble,
Panic sets racing her heart and knees.

My dear, I am no tiger nor
Some ravening African carnivore.
Come, leave your mother's side. It's time to
Go with the man you are ready for.

James Michie

'The Physiognomy of the Name'

C. A. BODELSEN

To many people there is a magic quality in names. In themselves, one school of logicians and linguists tells us, they mean nothing, while others have held that they mean more than any other kind of words. Both assertions are true in a way, and that they can both be true is due to the lack of precision in the very word 'meaning'. However that may be, one thing is certain: the name of somebody we know sums up for us all his qualities and the whole of his personality, and we feel that if he were called something else he would not be quite the same person.

No doubt it is this sense of what Forster calls 'the physiognomy of a name' that causes many authors to devote so much care to the naming of their characters. Obviously, the writer can do little with very common names, because there the impression he wants to convey is likely to be overlaid by impressions already formed by the reader from real persons he actually knows. One can do more with unusual names, especially if they are invented to suit the character in question. That (in connection with the law of libel) may be one reason why so many English novelists have gone in for names that one would look for in vain in the London Telephone Directory.

To find the name that strikes the reader as exactly the right one is an art which writers possess in very varying degrees. Two opposite examples, T. S. Eliot and Kipling, may illustrate this. With Eliot the name often not only epitomises the character, it is one of the principal means of creating it, and especially of suggesting that it belongs in a world of uncertain values, neuroses, and rootless cosmopolitanism:

> To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
> Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero

With caressing hands, at Limoges
Who walked all night in the next room;
By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
Shifting the candles; Fräulein von Kulp
Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.

Kipling, on the other hand, seems almost wholly to lack this sense of the appropriate name, in spite of the fact that his stories abound with oddly named people: Hatt, Nafferton, Pinecoffin, Pluffles, Wonder, Morrowbee Jukes, Kniveat, Godsoe, Humberstall, Hickmot, Masquerier, Mankeltow, etc. But few of these names seem to be more than bizarre labels, meaningless in themselves, and it is significant that they begin already in *Plain Tales*, where Kipling can hardly yet be said to be concerned with character at all. One of the few that strike me as symbolical, in the sense that Dickens's most felicitous names are symbolical, is *Manallace* in 'Dayspring Mishandled', which does seem somehow to express the slavery of the man to his obsessive scheme of revenge, possibly because of associations with 'manacle' and 'maniacal'.

As for Dickens, we know from many indications—e.g. his instructions to illustrators—that he visualised his characters as people who had a real existence. He knew exactly how they looked and dressed. That he liked to make them live in real houses in real streets, and that on occasion he gave them names borne by real persons—people he had known (like *Fagin* and *Weller*), or whose names he had noticed in newspapers or remembered from the time when he worked in a lawyer's office—may be connected with his tendency to confound ontological with artistic truth and to shore up the creations of his imagination with fragments of demonstrable reality.[1]

But whether the name was real or invented, his attitude to his characters made it necessary that it should be the right one for the person in question: the whole description would be wrong if the name was not right. It is difficult to think of any other explanation

[1]Cf. his defence of Krook's death by spontaneous combustion in the preface to *Bleak House*.

of his astonishing indiscretion in calling one of the heroines in *Edwin Drood* by very nearly the same name (*Helena Landless*) as that of the mistress he was so anxious that his public should know nothing about (Ellen Lawless Ternan). He gave much thought to the naming of his characters, and displayed very great skill in choosing names that, by some psychological process that is not always easy to follow, symbolise the personality of the bearer.

One can distinguish between several types of Dickensian names. He began by relying rather heavily on various types that are traditionally regarded as comic or low. Names like *Snubbin*, *Wugsby*, *Snodgrass*, *Tupman*, *Winkle*, *Wackles*, *Todgers*, or for that matter *Pickwick*—though by now the personality of the famous Dickensian character has crowded out most of its original associations—do not really tell us anything about the bearer, except that the author intends to present him in a comic light. They sound farcical in themselves and would render anybody ridiculous, like a false nose.

This kind of name, which abounds in *Pickwick Papers*, Dickens continues to use, though it gradually becomes rarer and tends to be replaced by another, though related, type, where the effect is fantastic or grotesque, rather than 'low': *Peggotty*, *Spottletoe*, *Sweedlepipe*, *Pumblechook*, *Tulkinghorn*, *Lirriper*, *Twinkleton*, etc. He also relied a good deal throughout his work on monosyllabic names, whose shortness, sometimes conjoined with certain sound combinations, stamp them as comic, like *Cheggs*, *Noggs*, *Knag*, *Pott* and *Wegg*, sometimes with an added note of baseness, like *Grub*, *Slurk*, etc. Most of the names belonging to the above-mentioned types conventionally suggest a low social status. So does another type: those ending in -ins. Dickens does use these a few times for comic effect (*Nupkins*, *Cluppins*) but he does so sparingly, as one would expect from a man whose own name came close to the type.

From an older convention he took the sort of name that really is a common noun, though often disguised in the spelling, and that thus means something in itself, like *Mrs. Leo Hunter*, *Dr. Payne*, *Knockemorf*, *Verisopht and Snuphanuph*. These are related to the

'humour' type of name, which goes back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The latter are rare in Dickens, though they do occur: *Sir Mulberry Hawk*. Altogether, Dickens uses both the two above-mentioned types sparingly for a Victorian humorist, much less than for example, Trollope. Possibly he felt that this well-worn joke was getting threadbare.

But Dickens's development as a novelist was to a great extent a development towards a greater reliance on symbolic effects, and especially in his later work he tends to endow those characters that interest him most with names that are part of the general symbolic technique: the name does not usually have an actual meaning of its own, it does not normally exist as a recognised part of the English vocabulary, but it tells something about the bearer, either by evoking associations with real words or by the symbolism which attaches to certain sounds, or even to the shape of certain letters. That Dickens was himself very susceptible to this 'letter symbolism', we know from several of his novels, e.g. *Great Expectations*.

The above may call for some comment: sound symbolism is by now a recognised, if not yet fully explored, branch of linguistics. It has been shown that certain sounds evoke the idea of particular qualities, like something deep, thick, hollow, coarse, soft, slow, heavy, etc., in the case of some vowels, while other vowels conversely call up the idea of something thin, fine, flat, hard, light, quick, bright, etc. There are sound combinations that produce an effect of swift or violent movement, of clumsiness, etc. In fact, some of the names mentioned above as traditionally comic or low probably owe the role thus assigned to them at least partly, to sound symbolism, and the feelings they evoke bear witness to the potency of the phonetic spell. For obviously, the people called *Cheggs*, for example (if there are any such in real life), cannot all be comic, and it is only an historical accident that no poet or hero has ever borne that name. Yet, in a novel it is comic to have a love affair with a person so called: 'Sorry, Ma'am! Sorry in the possession of a Cheggs!'

While the types of names mentioned in the beginning of this

article are traditional, and stock property of Victorian humorous literature, the 'symbolic' names are inventions of Dickens, and form part of a general symbolic technique that permeates his work. What happens is that the sound, or spelling, of the name directs the reader's mind towards certain associations, which in their turn impart their own overtones to the name. It need hardly be said that he need not, and usually does not, understand the mechanism of this process. Even the writer is no doubt often ignorant of how the effect is produced.

In some cases, however, the mechanism is fairly obvious: the name points to some ordinary word in such a way that one can hardly miss it, or it may even be identical with such a word, though that is rare in Dickens. In the latter case, the difference from the *Snuphanuph* and *Knockemorf* type is that the person's connection with the word is less direct: to realise the point of, for example, *Sampson Brass* one must remember the phrase 'bold as brass'. Other examples of fairly simple symbolic names are *Veneering*, *Dedlock*, *Bounderby*, *Barnacle*, *Stiltstalking*, *Stryver*, *M'Chokumchild* (which really does seem to evoke echoes of the name of some impossible early Victorian economist), and *Slyme*. With all these it is easy to see what they are meant to convey, and how they do it; and the same may be said of slightly more complicated cases like *Slackbridge*, or the two contrasted clerical characters in *Edwin Drood*: *Crisparkle* and *Honeythunder*. Usually, however, the effect is less direct and more subtle, as will be seen below. Dickens's symbolical names are often almost incredibly felicitous: that, one feels, is the only possible name by which that character could be called. But here a problem presents itself: is this really due to Dickens's art? Seeing that Dickens induced the world to accept an Irish name like *Fagin*, taken from a friendly boy at Warren's Blacking Factory, as a suitable name for an elderly Jewish criminal, might it not be truer to say that the names sound right simply because they take their colour from the characters in question?

This cannot, however, be the whole explanation. For it is by no means *all* Dickens's names that strike one as emblems of the personality of the bearer. The surname of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, for

example, is actually misleading, suggesting as it does a character like Pumblechook. *Plornish* and *Venus* are obviously chosen simply because they sound funny: they have nothing in particular to do with the personality of the people who are called like that. Nor has (at least to my mind) *Casby*, *Claypole*, *Dorrit*, *Drood*, *Nickleby*, *Harthouse*, *Haredale*, *Westlock*, *Wickfield*, *Wilfer*, *Garland*, *Carton*, *Jarndyce*, and, come to that, even *Weller* and *Micawber*. *David Copperfield* is a very colourless name for a hero, but well in keeping with Dickens's effort to keep this novel on a more realistic level than its predecessors. Altogether, a fairly large proportion of the names in Dickens are quite neutral—mere labels, like the run of names in the actual world.

But how apposite the best of them are one may test for oneself by taking a group of names from one profession, that of the Law, for example—say *Sampson Brass*, *Conversation Kenge*, *Tulkinghorn*, *Vholes* and *Jaggers*—and try to change them about. One will find, I think, that in this gallery of highly diversified legal types none of the names could be transferred from one character to another without striking a false note. It is tempting to try to find out what it is that makes these names so felicitous. In general it may be said that two things contribute to the effect: one is a set of overtones due to associations with some regular word in the language, and the other is sound symbolism. Why the sounds in question evoke the particular overtones in each separate case, a phonetician specialising in sound symbolism could no doubt approximately tell us. But the explanation would be complicated and highly technical. All we can do here is to call attention to the phenomenon without attempting to analyse it. The word-associations are usually easier to account for. But all this is a very abstract way of dealing with names that mean so much to every Dickensian. It might be worth while to look a little closer at a few of them by way of illustration.

Dombey is pure sound symbolism. The very sound of the name strikes a note of haughtiness and dreary pompousness and self-importance. It gives an impression of something that closes up tight. Besides, it suggests a cold in the head, and thus contributes

to the atmosphere of chilly discomfort which Dickens consistently evokes when he describes the Dombey household to symbolise the great man's lack of human warmth. With *Boffin*, sound symbolism is used to produce a different effect: until the name was introduced during the war as a common designation, it would, I think, by its very sound call up the picture of a kindly, simple-minded man with an expression of chronic open-mouthed surprise. *Clennam* has something harsh and bleak, akin to the iron sound of bells on that dreary London Sunday in Chapter III of *Little Dorrit* (ironically entitled 'Home') which epitomises that character's (and Dickens's own) mood of disillusionment. *Bentley Drummle* somehow suggests oafishness combined with brutality, while *Magwitch* clearly belongs in some submerged world below that of Victorian respectability. The name is freakish, and in some indefinable way debased. It must also, I suppose, be sound symbolism—the impression of something short and sharp—that makes *Bitzer* such an expressive name for a knowing prize-boy on the make. *Bumble* is much simpler to account for: besides sound symbolism the effect is of course due to the idea of a bumble bee (a word which itself contains sound symbolism), whose drone and heavy flight suggests the parish beadle's officiousness and self-conceit.

The name *Miss Flite*, one feels, tells one all about the bearer; one can *hear* (no doubt because it reminds one of 'flight' and 'flighty') that she is a little old lady whose speech is a trifle confused and who has difficulty in keeping her thoughts under control —a great improvement on *Miss Flighty*, as Dickens once thought of calling her, for in these matters hints are much more effective than direct statements.

The air of meanness that clings to *Scrooge* and *Squeers* no doubt owes something to associations with 'screw' (in the sense of 'miser') and 'squeeze', and thought-sound symbolism probably contributes to the effect. When you learn that Paul Dombey's headmaster is called *Dr. Blimber*, you know at once that he is an elderly pedant, probably because the name suggests 'blinkers' and 'to blink'.

That the name of the undertaker *Mr. Mould* reminds one of funerals and churchyards needs no explanation, but the effect of *Durdles* in *Edwin Drood* is more subtle: the name actually *describes* his dazed and alcoholic stumblings among the graves of 'the old 'uns'. *Cheeryble*, on the other hand, makes one think of 'cheery' and 'cheerful', and suggests the chirruping of a bird.

Steerforth is a stroke of genius, containing as it does, the very essence of the young man's bogus manliness, accepted at its face value by the hero-worshipping David. But if one is called *Walter Gay* one is really a spirited young man. (That this was meant to be an ironic point, because Walter was originally intended to succumb to the Upas Tree influence of the Dombey environment, is another matter.) *Murdstone* sounds both murderous and hard, the latter being part of a symbolism consistently used to characterise Miss Murdstone, and *Moddle*, one feels, is the only appropriate name for that lachrymose character: there is a sob and a gulp and a lump in the throat in the very sound. There is an air of bustle and goings to and fro about *Trotwood*, and also a touch of good-natured eccentricity, perhaps because one is reminded, via 'trot', of a little pony. *Bradley Headstone* has something abrupt and hard, and also something sinister, prophetic of this character's fate, because it suggests at the same time 'headstrong' and gravestones. It is more difficult to say why *Eugene Wrayburn* seems such a good name. Perhaps because the rather unusual collocation of long vowels produces a lingering effect suitable for the naming of an intellectual dawdler—in other words a piece of sound symbolism. It is possible that *Wray-* and *-burn* contribute to the characterization by bringing in his brilliance ('ray', 'to burn'), and by faintly suggesting 'wraith' with its hint at airiness and lack of substantiality. *Quilp* is obviously the name of a jocose troll, and *Carker* that of a sychophant. No one could mistake the character of a lady named *Mrs. MacStinger*. That the name of the swindler *Merdle* is meant to suggest the French 'merde' is a theory that has often been put forward, and that seems wholly plausible. Incidentally, the difference between this name and that of another and earlier swindler, *Montague Tigg* in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, is in itself

symptomatic of the change that Dickens's social criticism had undergone in the intervening time. *Tigg* is a comic and *Merdle* a repulsive name. The former describes a flamboyant character, who thoroughly enjoys the fruits of his somewhat primitive fraudulent manipulations, the latter a drab, dim personality with a secret 'complaint'—the fear of discovery—whose magnificent house is really a prison: crime, in Dickens the logical extreme of the Victorian philosophy of material success, not only blights society, but the criminal himself. He could afford to sum up Tigg by a name taken from the comic tradition, because he saw in him only a grotesque excrescence on the social body. But when he came to Merdle, the swindler had become the symptom of a cancer that was spreading through its vital organs. It is a fine example of Dickens's sureness of touch that he should have expressed the solid, dependable, pedestrian character and methods of the detective in *Bleak House* by giving him the name of a useful everyday household article like *Bucket*. *Podsnap* is another triumph: it contains all the man's bumptiousness and thick-headed conceit, as well as his steam-roller methods in conversation, the effect being produced by the sound symbolism of the first syllable, while the second evokes associations with 'to snap' and 'to snap somebody up'.

The way in which the associations that give the name its particular overtones are built up is sometimes complicated. Thus, the reason why *Gowan* strikes one as the right name for the character in *Little Dorrit*, is, I venture to guess, that 'gowan' means a daisy, that the daisy calls up the idea of a flower-sprinkled lawn, and that this in its turn suggests the Primrose Path. And there are cases where the associations seem to elude all attempts to trace them, and where even sound symbolism apparently fails to provide a clue. Why, for instance, is it that *Vholes* seems in itself almost a complete description of the unscrupulous, but perfectly respectable black-gloved lawyer who bears it, and that it calls up the idea of something slinky, insidious and sinister? Associations with 'vole' are hardly enough to explain it, and at any rate I am sure that it would have been less sinister without the 'h'. (One

wonders if the fact that 'vh' is practically non-existent in ordinary English has anything to do with it.) And why is *Pecksniff* so good? That to sniff is a traditional expression of pharisaical disapproval will hardly account for it. Nor can I find any convincing explanation of what seems to me the appropriateness of *Uriah Heep*, *Miss Wade* and *Hexam*, except that there is something sturdy and forthright about the last. One evidence of the care which Dickens devoted to the naming of his characters is the set of lists of 'Available Names' that he left behind him. They are of a fairly late date, and it is significant that they contain few names of the *Wugsby* and *Slurk* types mentioned above (though they have *Sugg*, *Wegg* and *Wopsle*), the majority of them belonging to the kind that lends itself to symbolical treatment. Some of them found their way into the novels of his later period, but most of them were never used. To a Dickensian it is a moving experience to read the names of these unborn souls that were to remain in the limbo outside the world that Dickens created. What, one wonders, would Henry Ghost or Rosetta Dust or Miriam Denial have been like? What fantastic characters would have borne the name of Topwash or Twinn?

¶ The lines (22–29) from *Gerontion* by T. S. Eliot on pages 39 and 40 are quoted by kind permission of the author and Messrs. Faber and Faber.

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The October number will include the following articles on Renaissance Drama: *Timon of Athens* by C. Wilson Knight; *The Ambivalence of Bussy D'Ambois* by C. L. Barber; *The Retrograde Genius of John Marston* by Gustav Cross; and *Tragedy: Religious and Humanist* by L. Lerner, as well as *The Intricate Alliance: The Novels of R. K. Narayan* by William Walsh and *A Nation's Odyssey: The Novels of Hugh Maclennan* by George Woodcock. It will also include a consolidated Contents list for 1961.

NOTES TO ILLUSTRATIONS

I DICKENS'S INSTRUCTIONS FOR *MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT*, PLATE XVIII

By John Butt

Dickens was accustomed to issue detailed instructions to Hablot Browne ('Phiz'), whom he employed as illustrator of his novel published in monthly parts from the third number of *Pickwick Papers* (1836) to the monthly version of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). Sometimes Browne's instructions were verbal; sometimes he had a proof to work from; but sometimes Dickens wrote out for him a page or more of directions. Manuscript instructions for Plates XVIII, XXXVII and XXXVIII, and for the frontispiece and title-page vignette of *Martin Chuzzlewit* are preserved in the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and it is with the kind permission of the Trustees of that library, and of Mr. Henry C. Dickens, that the instructions for Plate XVIII and Browne's sketch for this plate are now reproduced. The instructions (Plate I) read as follows:

The First Subject having shewn the settlement of Eden on paper, the second shews it in reality. Martin and Mark are displayed as the tenants of a wretched log hut (*for a pattern whereof see a vignette bought by Chapman and Hall*) in a perfectly flat swampy, wretched forest of stunted timber in every stage of decay, with a filthy river running before the door, and some other miserable log houses indicated among the trees whereof the most ruinous and tumble-down of all is labelled Bank and National Credit Office. Outside their door, as the custom is, is a rough sort of form or dresser, on which are set forth their pot and kettle and so forth: all of the commonest kind. On the outside of the house at one side of the door, is a written placard Chuzzlewit and Co. Architects and Surveyors; and upon a stump of tree, like a butcher's block, before the cabin, are Martin's instruments—a pair of rusty compasses &c. On a three legged stool beside this block, sits Martin in his shirt sleeves, with long dishevelled hair, resting his head upon his hands: the picture of hopeless misery—watching the river, as sadly remembering that it flows towards home. But Mr. Tapley up to his knees in filth and brushwood, and in the act of endeavouring to perform some impossibilities with a hatchet, looks towards him with a face of unimpaired good humour, and declares himself perfectly jolly. Mark the only redeeming feature. Everything else dull, miserable, squalid, unhealthy, and utterly devoid of hope: diseased, starved, and abject. The weather is intensely hot, and they are but partially clothed.

The moment chosen for the illustration occurs in the text shortly

before the end of Chapter xxiii. Only two or three words from the novel have been repeated in the instruction, from which much detail has indeed been omitted; yet it will be noticed that Browne has been moved to offer a mild protest: 'I can't get all this perspective in—unless you will allow of a long subject—something less than a mile.'

Browne's sketch (Plate II) proved not altogether satisfactory. He seems to have been misled by the phrase 'like a butcher's block' to draw a free-standing tree-stump. On this Dickens has commented, 'the stump of the tree should be *in* the ground, in fact a tree cut off two feet up'. He has also suggested how the sketch might be reduced to a more convenient size: 'too wide—cannot it be compressed by putting Martin's label on the other side of the door and bringing Mark with his tree forwarder. Qy is that a *hat* on his head.' The engraving as it appeared in *Martin Chuzzlewit* no. IX (Plate III) shows that Browne attended to the stump and the placard, adjusted the label on the bank, and removed the evidence of Mark's assault on his tree, but made no significant alteration to his hat.

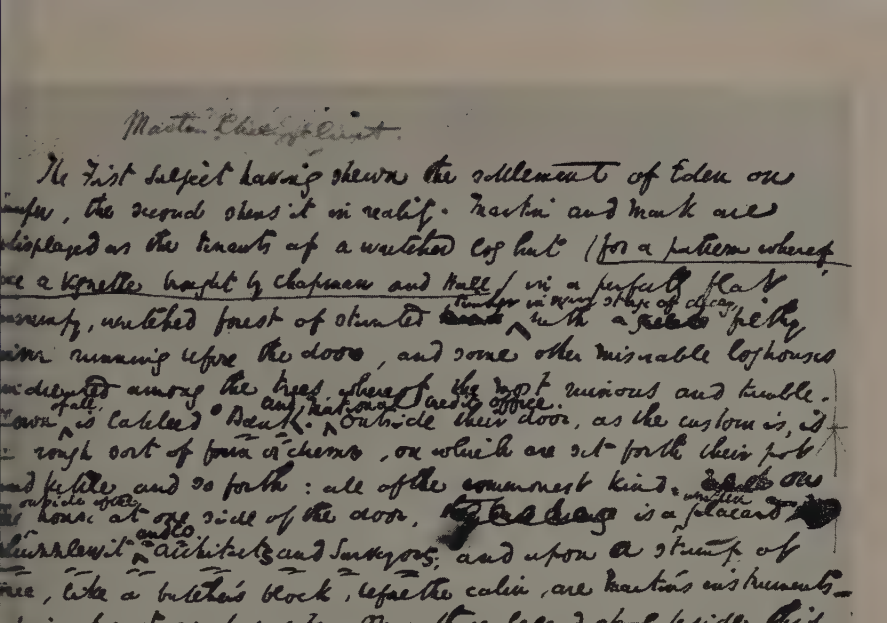
II A SKETCH OF CHARLES DICKENS

By Douglas Grant

Dickens was only twenty-nine when Edinburgh conferred the freedom of the city on him on 29 June 1841; a remarkable proof of the popularity he had won in so short a time.

Lord Jeffrey, one of his warmest admirers, urged him in 1841 to visit Scotland, and he set out for Edinburgh on 21 June. He was introduced to everyone upon his arrival and fêted wherever he went, and his triumph was complete when at a dinner given for him at the Waterloo Hotel on Friday, the 25th, about two hundred and fifty of his admirers sat down to table.

Jeffrey himself was to have taken the chair, but as he was unfortunately ill, Professor John Wilson—'Christopher North'—acted instead and proposed Dickens's health. Wilson admitted that he had come unprepared, but in spite of this he managed to speak emphatically enough of the guest's genius. 'This is no mere assemblage', he said, 'no mere confraternity of literary men, actuated by a desire to do homage to one who has outstripped all his competitors in the race of



Martin Chuzzlewit.

The first subject having shewn the settlement of Eden one
step, the second shews it in reality. Martin and Mark are
displayed as the tenants of a wretched log hut (for a pattern whereof
see a Vignette by Chapman and Hall) in a perfect flat
swamp, unlicked forest of stunted trees with a stagnant pestilent
pool running before the door, and some other miserable log houses
scattered among the trees, where the most ruinous and terrible.
known is labelled "Death". Outside their door, as the custom is, is
a rough sort of pair of chairs, on which are set forth their fob
and pistols and so forth: all of the commonest kind. Inside the
house at one side of the door, is a placard
"Chuzzlewit and Co. Architects and Surveyors", and upon a stump of
tree, like a butcher's block, before the cabin, are Martin's instruments—
pair of rusty compasses &c. On a three legged stool beside this
block, sits Martin in his shirt sleeves, with long dishevelled hair,
strip his head upon his hands: the picture of hopeless
misery — watching the river, as sadly remembering that it
flows towards home. Mark, up this knee in filth
and bushwood, and endeavouring to perform some impossibilities
in the act of
despair with a hatchet, looks towards him
with the merriest face a face of unimpaired good humour, and
radiates perfect jolly. Mark the one redeeming feature. Everything
else dull, wretched miserable, squalid, unhealthy, and utterly
devoid of hope: diseased, starved, and abject.

The weather is intensely hot, and they are both
partially clothed.

I can't get all this here but it is with
you and a view of a long street
with [illegible]

Plate I. Dickens's instructions for 'Martin Chuzzlewit', Plate XVIII.

Plate II. Hablot Browne's first interpretation of instructions, with Dickens's remarks.

Plate III. The engraving as it appeared.

Plate IV. A sketch of Dickens made in 1841 by William Allan, hitherto unpublished.

popularity (cheers), but it is an assemblage composed of men of different characters—of different professions—of different pursuits—of different degrees of mental cultivation and culture—all agreeing in admiration of his genius—sympathising in the victories which his genius has achieved, and in the pure and noble sentiments which he has made immortal (loud cheers).'

Dickens replied effectively and modestly, and found that the characters of his novels were the bond between himself and his listeners: 'I felt an earnest and humble desire, and shall do till I die, to increase the stock of harmless cheerfulness.'

Other toasts followed: to the memory of Sir Walter Scott; to the universities of Scotland, England, and Ireland; to the three great living poets, Wordsworth, Campbell, and Moore; to the memory of Burns; and to the absent Jeffrey. Dickens himself proposed toasts to the chairman and to the memory of Sir David Wilkie, and replied to the toast 'Mrs. Dickens and the ladies'. A full and long evening.

Dickens was closely studied by several observers. A reporter for the *Scotsman* wrote that he 'is rather under the middle size, with good features, and a luxuriant crop of hair falling over both ears'. And Dr. James Hedderwick noted: 'cheeks shaven like those of a comedian, black stock surmounted by no collar, in accordance with the fashion of the day, elaborate shirt front, and general showy get-up.'

Towards the end of the succession of toasts Wilson proposed the health of William Allan, his 'distinguished friend'. 'You all know', he told the guests, 'the adventurous life he led in his youth, and the enthusiasm in his art which led him to study in other lands—that character and costume which have given such an air of reality to the creatures of his imagination.' Allan had had an adventurous life as a painter, in Russia and Asia Minor, but he was now safe and successful at home, an A.R.A. and president of the Royal Scottish Academy. He was knighted in 1842.

As Allan sat and watched he picked up a place-card made out for 'The Steward's Friend' and rapidly sketched an impression of Dickens on the back. He stressed the long hair, the shaven cheeks, the black stock and hinted at 'the general showy get-up'. Either he himself or the friend to whom he gave the card wrote on it: 'Charles Dickins, drawn by William Allan 25th June 1841 at a dinner given to him in the Waterloo Hotel.' A pleasant souvenir of a memorable occasion, which has luckily survived, and is in the writer's possession.

Francis Jeffrey: Charles Dickens's Friend and Critic

D. CLEGHORN THOMSON

AMONG other letters in my possession written to Francis, Lord Jeffrey, I came across a portion of one the other day from Charles Dickens, which I do not think has yet been published. It is the surviving letter in a correspondence that was not to be closed until Jeffrey's death nine years later. It reads as follows:

> I am not at all tired with idleness. It is delicious—if I can call that idleness which is full of busy preparation.
>
> I have not written a line since I penned the words 'Master Humphrey's clock has stopped forever'. I have had a few visions of things to be done, and they have been very pleasant. Otherwise, I have done nothing but walk and lounge about and read drowsily all day long.
>
> What do you think of my reading the 'Curiosity Shop' *all through*? It deserves a note of interrogation as large as a lamp-post!
>
> Always, my dear Lord Jeffrey,
>
> Yours affectionately and attached,
>
> CHARLES DICKENS.

It is unfortunate that only this portion of the letter survives; but the month and year of the missing date (September, 1841) can be confidently supplied from the reference to finishing *Master Humphrey's Clock*. What is interesting to note is the degree to which Dickens was already in fact an affectionate and deeply attached friend of the great Editor of the *Edinburgh Review*.

We know that he first visited Edinburgh in 1834, at the age of twenty-four as a representative of the London *Morning Chronicle*—the daughter of whose Edinburgh-born manager he was to marry two years later—that he met Jeffrey (in London) in 1839, and that in 1841, he was entertained publicly in the city, and awarded

its Freedom. Jeffrey, although one of the main instigators of this public tribute to the novelist, was not in fact present at the dinner among the 250 people who gathered to do him honour. But on 4 May of that year Jeffrey wrote cordially to Lord Cockburn about his friend:

> And, above all, of Charles Dickens, with whom I have struck up what I mean to be an eternal and intimate friendship. He lives very near us here, and I often run over and sit an hour *tête à tête*, or take a long walk in the park with him—the only way really to know or be known by either man or woman. Taken in this way I think him very amiable and agreeable. In mixed company, where he is now much sought after as a lion, he is rather reserved, &c. He has dined here . . . and we with him, at rather too sumptuous a dinner for a man with a family, and only beginning to be rich, though selling 44,000 copies of his weekly issues, &c.
>
> (Cockburn, *Life of Lord Jeffrey*, II. 338.)

It is significant to note the faintly critical tones of this reference to Dickens as a host, in his days of early prosperity. In a letter of nine years later Jeffrey concludes with a delightfully frank bit of advice which testifies to the quality of the relationship between the two men:

> I daresay you do right to send one boy to Eton; but what is most surely learned there is the habit of wasteful expense, and, in ordinary natures, a shame and contempt for plebeian parents. But I have faith in races, and feel that *your* blood will resist such attaints. You do not think it impertinent in me to refer to them? I speak to you as I would to a younger brother. And so God bless you again, and ever yours.

This is only one among a number of intimate letters to Dickens from Jeffrey. They all bear the signs of affection and close friendship, opening warmly 'Bless you, my dear Dickens: my ever dear Dickens' and so forth and containing a rare mixture of critical comment on the characters in the new stories, as they poured from his friend's pen, and enquiries for personal and family matters.

The letter of September 1841 refers enigmatically to 'reading' *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Although Dickens's public readings still lay many years ahead, it is just possible that he was already contemplating them. The years when he came regularly to Edinburgh

on his Reading Tours were between 1858–69; and he seems to have formed an attachment for the city and to have become a considerable box-office draw there, as in other cities of Great Britain.

As we listen to the brilliant reconstruction of those Dickens readings by Emlyn Williams it may be interesting to recall how much influence the dominating personality of that old Edinburgh Reviewer had upon the rising novelist and how closely they remained friends during the later years of Lord Jeffrey's lifetime.

Professor Butt of Edinburgh, when I showed him this letter, pointed out what I had realised only imperfectly: 'Jeffrey considered himself Dickens's critic Laureate. . . . We know that Dickens treated them with so much respect that one of few well-authenticated alterations to the course of a novel (*Dombey and Son*) was made in deference to Jeffrey's criticism.'

It must be for others better qualified than myself to comment on the critical influence of Jeffrey on Charles Dickens. I am only giving a revealing small light on their personal relationship.

The Significance of Dickens's Periodicals

P. A. W. COLLINS

TOWARDS the end of his *Life of Dickens*, Forster acknowledged that 'less has been said in this work than might have been wished, of the way in which his editorship of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* was discharged'.[1] Later biographers and commentators have not hastened to repair this omission; no adequate study yet exists of these periodicals, though they have an important place in Dickens's career and in the history of popular journalism. Northcliffe's praise of Dickens, as the greatest magazine editor of his own or any other age, may seem a kiss of death, but something may be learned about our cultural and social history from tracing the relation between Dickens's periodicals of the eighteen-fifties and eighteen-sixties and his *Daily News* of 1846, and Northcliffe's *Answers* and *Daily Mail* a few decades later: while the student of Dickens must, as Percy Fitzgerald says, 'make his laborious way through the forty or fifty volumes of these journals, and follow his Dickens carefully. He will find traces of him on every page'.[2] He will certainly find Dickens's *name* at the top of every page, as Douglas Jerrold remarked sardonically when Dickens explained that all items would be anonymous. Only some of the main serial stories, Dickens's *Uncommercial Traveller* essays, were published under their authors' names. For the journals were very much an emanation of Dickens's personality.

How thoroughly he assumed responsibility for the political and social policies, as well as the artistic standards, of everything he

[1]John Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. J. W. T. Ley (London, 1928), p. 822.
[2]Percy Fitzgerald, *Memories of Charles Dickens* (London, 1913), p. 105.

published, appears in many letters to his contributors and staff. He suggests topics and lines of approach; he rejects or holds up articles which express views counter to his own; as tactfully as possible, he instructs such established novelists as Mrs. Gaskell and Bulwer Lytton in the difficult craft of serialisation. Sometimes he adds a signed paragraph amplifying or querying a remark, or writes a piece in formal collaboration with a colleague; more often he silently cuts or re-writes manuscripts he has accepted. 'I have had a story to hack and hew into some form for *Household Words* this morning', he writes to Forster, 'which has taken me four hours of close attention.' The proofs were 'a dreadful spectacle . . . [they] look like an inky fishing-net'. Even Mrs. Gaskell did not escape his 'improvements', which she resented.[1] Most of his staff and contributors, however, fell in with his style and ideas very eagerly. He had, of course, chosen like-minded colleagues and many of his most prolific writers were 'Dickens's young men' —talented beginners who had not yet a dignity and reputation to defend. They were much under his spell, not only imitating his tropes and humour, and adopting his outlook, but even writing, like him, in blue ink on blue paper. He had little need to bully or insist: as one of the young men, Edmund Yates, recalled:

> He was imperious in the sense that his life was conducted on the *Sic volo sic iubeo* principle, and everything gave way before him. The society in which he mixed, the hours which he kept, the opinions which he held, his likes and dislikes, his ideas of what should or should not be, were all settled by himself, not merely for himself, but for all those brought into connection with him, and it was never imagined they would be called in question. Yet he was never regarded as a tyrant: he had immense power of will, absolute mesmeric force . . . , and that he should lead and govern seemed perfectly natural to us.[2]

When he founded *Household Words* in 1850 he had of course long enjoyed a popularity and prestige unique in English literature. He had considered entitling the magazine simply *Charles Dickens* or *Charles Dickens's Own*, not so bumptious a notion as it might seem: for in the periodical boom of this period many magazines had depended on the cult of literary personality—*Eliza Cook's*

[1]Forster, p. 823; A. B. Hopkins, *Elizabeth Gaskell* (London, 1952), Ch. VIII.
[2]Edmund Yates, *Recollections and Experiences* (London, 1884), ii, 94.

Journal, *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine*, magazines run by and named after William Howitt, Harrison Ainsworth, Thomas Cooper and several lesser figures. Dickens's had much the longest run: under its new name, *All the Year Round*, it was still prospering when he died in 1870. Only the publishers' journals—*Bentley's Miscellany*, *Chambers's Journal*, and the rest—had comparable stability. The title Dickens eventually chose in 1850 exploited the domestic appeal in Victorian life and letters, to which he was wholly sympathetic; in the magazine world, *Household Words* belongs with the *Family Herald*, *Family Friend*, *Home Circle* and *Home Companion*.[1] He had long been hankering after a weekly mouthpiece. The monthly *Bentley's Miscellany*, which he edited from 1837 to 1839, had not been wholly his in conception and control, and he soon discovered that editing a daily newspaper was not to his taste. Back in 1839, he had planned a threepenny weekly on the lines of the *Tatler*, *Spectator* and Goldsmith's *Bee* (but 'far more popular in the subjects of which it treats and its mode of treating them'). It would 'take advantage of all passing events', with satirical papers on magistrates and other such social nuisances; it would contain fiction, historical essays, travel-sketches, fanciful papers, and the like. This project led to *Master Humphrey's Clock*, which became, against Dickens's will, merely a vehicle for his own serialised novels. A few years later he agreed with his new publishers, Bradbury and Evans, to conduct a magazine. This plan was not realised, but the next year he was writing enthusiastically to Forster about a further project for a three-halfpenny weekly, with a 'real, defined, strong, genial drift and purpose'—'*Carol* philosophy, cheerful views, sharp anatomisation of humbug, jolly good temper; papers always in season, pat to the time of year; and a vein of glowing, hearty, generous, mirthful, beaming reference in everything to Home, and Fireside'. It would be called *The Cricket*, and should 'put everybody in a good temper, and make such a dash to people's fenders and armchairs

[1]See Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: a Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800–1900* (Chicago, 1957), Ch. xiv and xv, and Margaret Dalziel, *Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago* (London, 1957).

as hasn't been made for many a long day . . . I would at once sit down upon their very hobs'.[1] Again the plan got nowhere, the *Daily News* project having cropped up instead; only the title was salvaged, for the next *Christmas Book*. But this formulation of his journalistic aim closely anticipates the 'Preliminary Word' to *Household Words* five years later and the phraseology of his letters to Mrs. Gaskell, Mary Howitt, Charles Knight and others whose assistance he then invited. 'We hope to do some solid good', he told one of these, 'and we mean to be as cheery and pleasant as we can.'[2] *The Cricket* was to have provided, too, that regular, affectionate, and intimate contact with his audience ('I would . . . take a personal and confidential position with them') which he so much enjoyed, and obtained not only through the weekly magazines but also through serialising all his novels and giving Public Readings. 'His life-long love-affair with the reading public', it had been remarked, 'is, when all is said, by far the most interesting love-affair of his life.'[3]

Three times in the eighteen-forties had had promised to write for the *Edinburgh Review*, but had postponed and then abandoned the task. Such weighty and impersonal journals of opinion were not his element. His own weeklies offered popular family entertainment—'cheery and pleasant', briskly written, with smart punning titles carefully devised by Dickens to inveigle the ordinary reader into embarking on articles of serious social importance. 'Brighten it, brighten it, brighten it!' Dickens would write to his rather plodding sub-editor Wills. 'KEEP *HOUSEHOLD WORDS* IMAGINATIVE! is the solemn and continual Conductorial Injunction.' But there was to be no 'writing *down*' to their audience—'I always hold that to be as great a mistake as can be made'—and 'Nothing can be so damaging to *Household Words* as carelessness about facts. It is as hideous as dullness.'[4] The long

[1]Forster, pp. 10–41, 378–9.

[2]Letter to the Rev. James White, 5 February 1850.

[3]John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London 1957), p. 75.

[4]Letters to Wills, 5 August 1853, 21 November 1853, 12 October 1852, 18 March 1853 (see *Charles Dickens as an Editor: being Letters written by him to William Henry Wills, his Sub-Editor*, ed. R. C. Lehmann [London, 1912]).

correspondence with Wills shows Dickens as a highly efficient, energetic, and professional editor, fertile in ideas and watchful over every detail, careful about money, but with a strong sense of responsibility as well as a determination to please his readers and maintain and increase his sales (the periodicals, indeed, soon became 'a very valuable property'). Social themes which had appeared in the novels recur in many articles and short-stories: workhouses, governmental inefficiency, the administration of the civil and criminal law, the need for more and better schools, the sanitary question, hospitals and asylums, and so on. Dickens was, at the time, credited with many more items than he wrote—a misapprehension he did not always discourage. Stories and articles were reprinted as pamphlets or in pirated American editions, under his name; and standard histories of institutions and of Victorian social movements still contain many joyful references to articles 'by the master-hand of Dickens himself', which were in fact written by his colleagues.[1] Many of these pieces had, or were said to have, a great influence at the time; Dickens was already a power in the land, and when articles in his periodicals attracted widespread attention, being reprinted in *The Times* and other newspapers, his colleagues were so too, if anonymously and temporarily.

They were not nonentities. The original *Household Words* team included such reputable craftsmen as Harriet Martineau, Mrs. Gaskell, John Forster, R. H. Horne, the Howitts, Charles Knight, and Henry Morley; the 'young men' who joined later included Sala, Edmund Yates, Percy Fitzgerald, Wilkie and Charles Collins, Walter Thornbury, and John Hollingshead. Readers got a good two-penn'orth. Every number contained twenty-four pages,

[1]Some academic writers on Dickens remain, surprisedly, unaware that the authorship of every item in *Household Words* can be ascertained, simply by consulting the photostat or typescript copies of the office Contributors' Book, at Dickens House (48 Doughty Street, W.C. 1). Unfortunately, the *All the Year Round* Contributors' Book has disappeared, but Dickens's own uncollected contributions were identified, and reprinted in *Miscellaneous Papers*, ed. B. W. Matz (London, 1908, and subsequent editions). Dickens himself had reprinted some of his miscellaneous items in *Reprinted Pieces* (1858) and *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861 and 1868). His *Christmas Stories* were collected in 1871.

double-column and un-illustrated, with some six or seven items—generally an instalment of a serial story, one or two items on topical issues, some descriptions of travel abroad or at home, a literary or historical article, perhaps a fanciful essay, and a poem. In poetry, certainly, Dickens's taste was banal, and he had little contact with the best poets of the day. There is no Tennyson or Browning, no Pre-Raphaelites: a few contributions from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Meredith, and Coventry Patmore, but otherwise the only recognisable names are 'Owen Meredith', and Adelaide Anne Procter. In fiction, Dickens did much better—indeed, only Thackeray's *Cornhill* could begin to rival him in the magazine field. *Household Words* had opened with serialised short-stories by Mrs. Gaskell, William Howitt, and Harriet Martineau, later it had a few full-length novels—*Hard Times*, which nearly doubled its circulation, Wilkie Collins's *The Dead Secret*, and Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford*, *North and South*, and *My Lady Ludlow*. 'It was the first cheap fiction magazine to contain original work.'[1]

In *All the Year Round* (1859 onwards), Dickens relied much more heavily on full-length serials, aiming, as he said, to print 'some sustained works of imagination that may become part of English literature'.[2] (They were also unbeatable as circulation-maintainers, though he did not stress this point in public.) This decrease in the journals' political and social content distressed many of his staff, and it provides useful evidence of his declining interest in public affairs (a feature of his later life which has not been sufficiently noticed), but he certainly fulfilled his literary promise. The first volumes of *All the Year Round* contained, in succession, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *The Woman in White*, Lever's *A Day's Ride*, *Great Expectations*, Lytton's *A Strange Story*, Collins's *No Name*, Mrs. Gaskell's *A Dark Night's Work* and Reade's *Hard Cash*. In the remaining seven years of his editorship, however, only *The Moonstone* stands out; the serials come from writers

[1] Graham Pollard, 'Serial Fiction', in *New Paths in Book Collecting*, ed. John Carter (London, 1934), p. 264.

[2] *All the Year Round*, ii, 95: see my 'Dickens as an Editor: some Uncollected Fragments', *The Dickensian*, lvi (1960), 90.

forgotten now, though popular at the time—Spicer, Sala, Fitzgerald (five from him), Amelia B. Edwards, Charles Collins, Frances Eleanor Trollope, Rosa Mulholland, Edmund Yates. Short-stories were now coming from Mrs. Lynn Linton, Thomas Adolphus Trollope, and Sheridan le Fanu. Dickens's luck, or taste, had declined; more important, he had lost interest. His strenuously active life contains many examples, like this, of his enthusiastically taking up some task, and then tiring of it. Editing became more of a burden, particularly when the Public Reading tours took him away from London. He wrote much less often for *All the Year Round* than for its predecessor, and displayed less initiative in running it and giving it a personal flavour. But along with much ephemeral matter and rubbish, *All the Year Round* still contained enough sound journalism and good fiction to be obligatory reading for anyone seriously interested in current literature. Mid-Victorian culture was sufficiently homogeneous for many of its best writers to find an outlet in this cheap popular family magazine—and it was no fault of Dickens's that George Eliot was not among them. He was one of her earliest and warmest admirers, and only her reluctance to endure weekly serialisation prevented her accepting his repeated invitations to contribute.[1] Thackeray and Anthony Trollope were engaged elsewhere (and Dickens had little relish for them); otherwise he employed all the leading novelists of his age. His taste, of course, inclined towards the popular 'sensational' novel and, with reservations, the 'domestic'. Anything that might call a blush to the cheek of a young person, or that might distress a normal family audience, was excluded. Dickens did not chafe against these restrictions, as editor or as novelist; he accepted the current notions of propriety, if sometimes in his life he quietly sinned against them. The success, indeed, of his journals (as of his novels) was largely due to his sincerely accepting, and reflecting, the average outlook of his contemporaries. No writer of such genius had edited, so successfully and for so long, a weekly periodical; but none was so essentially the Ordinary Man writ large. Wilkie

[1] See G. S. Haight, 'Dickens and Lewes', *PMLA*, lxxi (1956), 166–79.

Collins's remark is relevant, too: 'Dickens is not only a man of genius, he is a good business man.'[1]

The periodicals are relevant, however, not only as a broad indication of the cultural standards and social outlook of Dickens and his public. Many contributions, by Dickens and his colleagues, are manifestly related to details in the novels. The old game of discovering 'Dickens's originals'—whether persons or scenes—has often been played amateurishly, and is thus discredited: but more may be gained than the simple satisfaction of noting a 'source' in Dickens's experience or reading. In Humphry House's *The Dickens World* there is a pregnant footnote. House quotes G. M. Young's epigram that Dickens was 'equally ready to denounce on the grounds of humanity all who left things alone, and on the grounds of liberty all who tried to make them better', and he comments: 'This is on the whole true of the novels, less true of the short stories, and hardly true at all of the occasional journalism and speeches.'[2] The disparity between his fictional and non-fictional pronouncement reflects, as House says, the perplexity of his time; equally, it points attention to the essentially satirical and negative nature of Dickens's most successful creative work. The 'good' characters in the novels are less convincing than the bad or ludicrous ones, and their range of constructive thought and activity is smaller than that displayed by Dickens and his colleagues in the magazines; and when Dickens as narrator intrudes with a 'message', it is generally vaguer than the proposals he was prepared to enunciate editorially. Much remains to be done on this connection and disparity between Dickens the novelist and Dickens the journalist, public man, and private philanthropist. The novels alone often give a misleading impression of his views, as Dr. K. J. Fielding in particular has pointed out in several studies.[3] One would hardly guess from the remarks about training colleges in *Hard Times* and *Our Mutual Friend* that Dickens was their

[1]Kenneth Robinson, *Wilkie Collins: a Biography* (London, 1951), p. 125.

[2]Humphry House, *The Dickens World* (London, 1941), p. 201 note.

[3]e.g. in his *Charles Dickens: a Critical Introduction* (London, 1958), and in 'Dickens as a Speaker', prefixed to his edition of *The Speeches of Charles Dickens* (Oxford, 1960).

advocate, or from the uproarious account of Charlie Hexam's school in 'a miserable loft in an unsavoury yard' that Dickens was the most important literary friend of the Ragged School movement. The sentimental-sensational treatment of Martha and Em'ly in *David Copperfield* is quite untouched by the intelligence and insight he had long been displaying at a Home for real 'Fallen Women' (which he soberly described in a *Household Words* article), while the 'Model Prisoners' episode in that novel does not show as clearly as *Household Words* just how brutal and reactionary his penological ideas had by then become.

Many of Dickens's ideas lasted a life-time, and when he changed his mind he was rarely articulate about, or even conscious of, the fact. Here again, the twenty years' run of the periodicals can buttress the often scanty evidence of the letters. Thus, two American scholars have adroitly used articles that Dickens allowed to be published under his auspices to supplement the direct evidence for his growing tolerance towards Jews and his hardening of heart towards Negroes in his later years.[1] One could show similar modifications in his attitude towards such social issues as the Poor Law, flogging, and capital punishment; more subtly, by noting how and when once-popular topics drop out of sight, one can plot the rise and decline of his preoccupations.

Dickens cannot, of course, be made responsible for every detail of the opinions expressed by his contributors; this, I think, is an error into which Dr. Monroe Engel falls when using numerous quotations from the periodicals as evidence of his political and literary ideas (in his recent book *The Maturity of Dickens*). Often, manifestly, Dickens was in entire agreement with his colleagues (or had even told them exactly what to say), and one may safely assume that he did not actively disagree with anything he published, unless he said so in a footnote or happened, rarely, to be inattentive. But the periodicals are not only a guide to his opinions; he was also presumably aware of any facts printed there, and of places and persons described. (Here I may mention, as

[1]Harry Stone, 'Dickens and the Jews', *Victorian Studies*, ii (1959), 223–53; A. A. Adrian, 'Dickens on American Slavery', *PMLA*, lxvii (1952), 315–29.

specially relevant, and little explored, the monthly news-supplement *The Household Narrative*, which appeared from 1850 to 1855.) R. H. Horne's article 'Dust' of 1850 reappeared, after fourteen years in ' the deep well of unconscious cerebration', in the dust heaps of *Our Mutual Friend*; a news-item of 1850, and a 'capital' poem (as Dickens thought it at the time) published in 1853, lie behind Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* (1860); with less time to mature, *Household Words* items suggest many episodes and characters in *Bleak House* (1852-53)—the Inquest in the Sol's Arms, the fever-ridden church-yard, Inspector Bucket, Jo, Phil Squod, Mrs. Pardiggle, and Mrs. Jellyby, while there are many journalistic parallels to the novel's attacks on the Chancery Courts, Parliament, Pusayism, Dandyism, and Foreign Missions. Much the same can be said of the other novels from *David Copperfield* onwards. Of course, Dickens like any other creative writer alters, heightens, improves upon, or distorts, fact when he builds his fictions upon it (here begins the task of the literary critic—though here, too, lies a peril for the unwary historian); but as Humphry House said—and he was the first man to make serious use of the periodicals—Dickens is 'far more factual than might appear', 'the best commentaries on many parts of his novels are his own articles and short stories, and articles and stories that he supervised as editor'.[1]

[1]House, p. 14.

It is regretted that Random House Inc. were omitted from acknowledgements in respect of extracts from James Joyce's *Ulysses:* (Vol. II, No. 2, p. 73).

Thoughts on 'David Copperfield'

ARNOLD KETTLE

THE most thorough and rewarding discussion of *David Copperfield* so far is that contained in Professor Sylvère Monod's *Dickens Romancier* (1953). These pages, together with the chapter '*David Copperfield* Month by Month' in John Butt's and Kathleen Tillotson's *Dickens at Work* (1957) which supplements them, have the advantage of making use of the material in the Forster Collection of Dickens manuscripts in the Victoria & Albert Museum, especially the notes or 'number-plans' which Dickens made in the course of writing his novels. Scholarly research, however admirable, does not always have the effect of putting literary criticism on the right track; but in this case it certainly does so.

Perhaps the underlying reason for the critical value of these recent researches is revealed in a sentence from Monsieur Monod's book:

> Dickens aurait presque pu donner pour sous-titre à son roman (comme Wordsworth appelant son prélude *the growth of a poet's mind*) *the growth of a novelist's mind.*

Monsieur Monod is not concerned to follow up in any sort of detail the comparison he has so suggestively thrown out, but it provides an interesting starting-point for a reconsideration of *David Copperfield.*

The autobiographical basis of *Copperfield* has, of course, always been recognised and scarcely needs for its substantiation a detailed knowledge of the novelist's life. It permeates the book and gives it that particular sense of intimacy and tenderness which distinguishes it among Dickens's novels. This is not simply due to the book's being written in the form of a first-person narrative. In the Esther Summerson part of *Bleak House* and the whole of *Great*

Expectations Dickens also uses the first person, but the effect, though it certainly increases our sense of intimacy with Esther and Pip, is not the same. There is a great deal to be said for Bernard Shaw's view that '*David Copperfield*, once Dickens's pet book, was wiped out by *Great Expectations*': what Shaw is referring to is, basically, a growth in objective realism and all-round dramatic and intellectual power in the later book. But though *Great Expectations* as an achieved work of art is indeed an advance on *David Copperfield*, we should not on that account undervalue the peculiar quality of the earlier book. It seems to me that, looking at Dickens's development as a whole, it was necessary for him in 1849 to write *Copperfield* and that, without the subjective exploration which that novel involved, he could not well have advanced to the triumphs of the four supreme masterpieces: *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*.

The value of Monsieur Monod's comparison with *The Prelude* (though I do not wish, any more than he, to make too much of it) is twofold. It indicates the *sort* of use of biographical material Dickens is making in this novel, and it links Dickens to where he is—to the loss of both—too seldom linked, the English Romantic movement.

If we consider the phrase 'the growth of a novelist's mind' in connection with *David Copperfield* we are likely to be struck by the thought that the word mind in relation to Dickens, as to Wordsworth, has a very unintellectual, or at least unacademic, flavour. Yet it is the right word. Conceptual thinking, anything like what we have come to associate with 'philosophy' as a subject or discipline, is most certainly not what Dickens goes in for. And, unlike Wordsworth, the novelist felt no temptation, on the plane of 'high endeavour' at least, to enter the field of philosophy by another gate—to go one better than the philosophers. Yet to set up Dickens's artistic method—the whole splendid and complex structure of imaginative insight within which he worked—in some kind of opposition to mental, rational, intellectual activity is to go hopelessly astray. One of the striking things about Dickens's career is the growth, between his earlier

and later books, of intellectual power. This power emerges not so much in a change of texture in the novels, for the early novels have, as we all know, an extraordinary charm, richness and vitality in this respect, as in a maturing organisational control. More and more he knows what he is doing, and what he is doing becomes more and more *serious*.

Martin Chuzzlewit and *Dombey and Son* mark a tremendously impressive advance in organisational power on their predecessors, and *Dombey* is an advance on *Chuzzlewit*. Dickens had by now almost abandoned the limitations of a picaresque method, with its advantage of a non-dogmatic, non-allegorical freedom, but the disadvantage of a lack of overall pattern. But to advance beyond *Dombey* in his quest towards a more objective, inclusive realist novel, it was necessary for him to take stock, to clear his mind of cant. This need is the basis of *David Copperfield*, and if it involves an autobiographical method which seems to step backwards towards the picaresque that impression is in fact illusory. If we use the word 'moral' to indicate the nature of Dickens's progress and development, it will help us to value the comparison with Wordsworth.

I am not suggesting that Dickens wrote *Copperfield* in order to get his inhibitions out of his system. Some of the recent biographical work on Dickens seems to me to overstate the neurotic element in the novelist's life and work: thus it is remarkable how practically he managed his affair with Ellen Ternan. On the whole his treatment of autobiographical material is notably relaxed and unneurotic, even when the material was potentially very tricky. And I think this is true, by and large, of *David Copperfield*.

There is no dispute about the success of the first part of *Copperfield*, the quarter of the novel up to David's arrival at Dover. Everyone agrees that it is wonderful. The evocation (it is more than background) of the East Anglian countryside and the London squalor; the combination of subjective impression—so that we see David's world from his angle—with objective structure and implied comment; the appalling struggle between the values of human kindness, expressed most firmly in the Peggotty

family, more querulously in David's mother and Traddles and the Micawbers, and, on the other side, the world of the Murdstones and Creakles: all these are beyond praise. What emerges from these first fourteen chapters is a series of images, each one vivid, some intense and others more relaxed, merging into a total image of pain and 'want of hope' (the phrase is Dickens's own). Not hopelessness, for there are gleams and areas of kindness, humour and goodness. Yet the good, though they can comfort and provide a bulwark against despair, seem helpless, doomed to be ineffectual—or, at best, isolated—in the face of the controlling forces of evil which flow from the home, the factory, and the school, which Murdstonism dominates and, in effect, owns.

David is saved from the Murdstone world by Betsey Trotwood, and Chapter xv is headed 'I Make Another Beginning'. The central critical problem of the novel must involve the question: what is the relation between the first quarter of the book and the rest? In what sense is the new beginning related artistically to the old one?

The temptation is to see Betsey Trotwood simply as a fairy godmother (which of course she is) 'solving' David's problems by buying him out of them. Even when she is 'ruined' a comfortable middle-class existence is still available and the practical difficulty of the social/financial gap between David and Dora cancelled out by Mr. Spenlow's death, which leaves Dora 'ruined', too. I used to read the novel in this way and to regard the latter three-quarters as basically a bore, though of course with marvellous bits. But my general experience with Dickens has warned me against easy under-estimations of him and I now feel, returning to *Copperfield*, that my old reading of the novel was superficial.

Perhaps the most curious thing about the first quarter of *David Copperfield*, as one looks back on it, is how little effect his sad and horrible experiences seem to have had on David himself. It is true that he has been extremely miserable and extremely lonely, and that there is indeed a nightmare quality about certain of his experiences. A twentieth-century novelist would almost certainly treat these experiences in one of two ways. Either, if the approach

were that of focusing attention on the main character (one thinks of *Sons and Lovers* or Ostrovsky's *How the Steel was Tempered*), David would be insistently 'marked' for life by his childhood miseries and recover from them, if at all, only with great and slow difficulty. Or else (in the manner of *A High Wind in Jamaica* or *Lord of the Flies*), the experiences would be related in an apparently 'objective' way and either no conclusions drawn or metaphysical ones about the Nature of Man imposed. Neither of these procedures applies to *Copperfield* and this, I suspect, is why the sophisticated twentieth-century reader tends to meet the novel somewhat unsympathetically and to read it wrongly. For I believe it is a mistake to see the first quarter of the book as quite as essentially different from the rest as we tend to make it. It is true, of course, that David's early adventures *are* different from his later ones: they are not only grimmer but more intense. Nothing that happens to him afterwards—even when he makes a great performance of emphasising its significance, like the storm at Yarmouth—is anything like so awful as that return to Blunderstone to find his mother married and the house changed, or the putting of the placard on his back at school, or the frightful loneliness of his life in London, or the stealing of his box, or the episode with the mad junk-shop man at Chatham: for in his later life David is in a position to avoid the crueller of such episodes and has in any case more resources with which to cope with misfortune. But the point I would wish to emphasise is, despite the horrors, David's relative *immunity* in even the early stages of the book, his capacity for resisting, and even ignoring, the corruption that surrounds him.

This immunity is not quite the same as, in an earlier book, Oliver Twist's. Oliver never really asserts himself as a person at all. But David is *there* all right, not as firmly (or critically) delineated as Pip but undeniably and quite recognisably someone. And the immunity is quite consciously evoked and even discussed by Dickens. When David writes (of the period at Blunderstone just after his mother's death):

I was not actually ill-used. I was not beaten, or starved, but the wrong that

was done to me had no intervals of relenting, and was done in a systematic, passionless manner,

the note is caught not only of the Murdstones' cruelty but of his own attitude to it. David refers several times to his relationship with the other boys at Murdstone and Grinby's:

I never . . . made a single acquaintance, or spoke to any of the many boys whom I saw daily in going to the warehouse, in coming from it, or in prowling about the streets at mealtimes . . . .

How much I suffered, it is . . . utterly beyond my power to tell. But I kept my own counsel, and I did my work. I knew from the first that, if I could not do my work as well as any of the rest, I could not hold myself above slight and contempt. I soon became, at least, as expeditious and as skilful as either of the other boys. Though perfectly familiar with them, my conduct and manner were different enough from theirs to place a space between us . . . .

No episode catches more marvellously this combination of naïveté and precosity, loneliness and self-sufficiency, than the little scene in which David, to celebrate his birthday or some such occasion, orders a glass of the Genuine Stunning ale.

What is the basis of this ability of David's to resist the blows which he so cruelly suffers? The immunity is based on three elements: first, a certain deep social snobbishness, a sense of being 'above' the people he is thrown among (including, incidentally, the Peggottys), and of a need to maintain, even in the face of almost impossible difficulties, certain social standards; secondly, an ingrained respect for work as a moral force, capable of holding together the disintegrating elements of existence; and, thirdly, an intense inner life of the imagination based, above all, on the stories read by and to him in early childhood.

These are the qualities which take David as far as Dover, and that they are also the qualities that steered Dickens through his youth needs no emphasis. What is, perhaps, not quite so obvious is that they are also the qualities which accompany him on the new beginning which Betsey Trotwood's humane generosity makes possible. The last three-quarters of the novel examines the problems with which David is faced when, released by Aunt Betsey from the underworld of horror, he embarks—his resources

already stacked for good and ill—on the business of pursuing an active, as opposed to enduring a passive, life.

We should recognise in passing that the fairy-godmother figure of Betsey Trotwood is necessary to Dickens for very good reasons. When Disraeli, four years before *Copperfield*, wrote of the two nations of rich and poor 'between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy', who are 'dwellers of different zones, inhabitants of different planets', he was describing accurately British society of the early nineteenth century. It is interesting to notice how complete in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel right up to about 1870, the division is. The last thing that any struggling character or buffeted hero in an eighteenth-century novel ever thinks of doing is manual work. To get a job in a factory to tide over a hard time, let alone a long vacation, is not one of the possibilities open to the aspiring young man or woman of the early Victorian novel. Even a Heathcliff has to have a patron to lift him out of the gutter. The lucky or able apprentice might rise in the world, like Rouncewell the ironmaster in *Bleak House*; but by and large if you were born into or got into the pit of real, basic poverty (as opposed to debt, from which there were, for the gentleman, certain escape routes) you were done for. This is part of the significance of Mr. Micawber and, of course, of Dickens's father. His gentility, though in one sense absurd, inappropriate and even ruinous, is an essential resource. He may land in the King's Bench Prison, but that is not like falling into the pit. It is this very necessity of saving innocence from the pit that gives rise to the Brownlows, the Jarndyces, and the Betsey Trotwoods of Dickens's novels, though in the last books of all he is beginning to be able to dispense with them.

Betsey Trotwood is far and away the best of Dickens's fairy-godmothers, largely because she is a woman and has, as a consequence, more problems of her own than her male counterparts and hence more material out of which to forge a character. And Aunt Betsey, though she provides David with the wherewithal to operate within the only sphere in which active achievement is possible to him, is not unaware of her nephew's weaknesses. She

loves him but she recognises his blindness. For the qualities which David has brought with him through the pit, and which have indeed permitted him to be saved from it (for, unlike Oliver and Esther, his new beginning has involved moves of active endeavour and rebellion on his part), are two-edged qualities. Of the three I have mentioned—social snobbishness, respect for work, withdrawal into the world of the imagination—only one ingredient of David's immunity is an unmixed blessing. His capacity for hard work is entirely positive and is to stand him in very good stead during future troubles, for he pegs away at his shorthand and his novels through all his various crises. But the other two aspects of his self-sufficiency are both highly treacherous.

The two most serious mistakes that David makes are his judgements of Steerforth and Dora. The bulk of *David Copperfield* is really about these mistakes and their consequences. Their significance is that they are not isolated mistakes and also that their implications bridge the two areas of David's career. His romanticisation of Steerforth, forgivable enough in its early stages, is carried over into the later period: his dream-picture of Dora is the continuation of a habit of mind developed in the days of his earliest vulnerability. For his relationship with Dora is associated with his attitude to women altogether and the sort of idealisation involved is linked with the idealisation of Steerforth too. In both cases the relevant word is romantic. It is not a word that Dickens plays on ('undisciplined' is the recurring adjective of this aspect of the novel), but it occurs, significantly, on the left-hand page of his number-plan for Serial No. XII—the section of the book leading up to the marriage with Dora. The notes opposite Chapter xxxvi read:

> Progress of David to a working state, still tinged, romantically, by his youth and character, and overdone. No similar progress on the part of Dora. Poor little Dora, not bred for (the world) a working life.

It is indeed the romantic attitudes of David which lead him, and indirectly other people, into situations which can—within the

Victorian scheme of things—be obliterated only by death. And the day-dream nature of these romantic attitudes—the idealisation of 'love' (Em'ly, Miss Sheppard, Miss Larkins, Dora) and of Steerforth, the Byronic superman, aristocratic self-confidence and all—is revealed in the novel as no mere arbitrary personal 'weakness' in David's character, but as an important and complex socio/psychological problem of nineteenth-century England. One of the most revealing moments in the David/Dora story is when David recognises that he is trying to 'form' Dora's character, just as Mr. Murdstone had tried to form his mother's.

Almost the whole of the second and longer section of *David Copperfield* is, in some way or other, about marriage and the relationships of men and women. In no other of his novels is Dickens so continuously occupied with this relationship. Marriage and courtship are exhibited in almost every possible variation. There are, of course, in the background the two hopeless marriages—the one fatal, the other parried—of David's mother and aunt. Then there is Peggotty's marriage, the Micawbers', the Strongs', Traddles's, the Jorams', Julia Mills's, the shadow of Mr. Wickfield's and the marriage Uriah Heep would like to make; and alongside them the careers of the three 'fallen' women, Em'ly, Martha and (more ambiguously) Rosa Dartle. Even Mrs. Gummidge is proposed to on the boat going to Australia.

The growth of David's mind after his new beginning is in fact explored largely in terms of his personal relationships. It is the disciplining of his heart that is his deepest problem. We learn very little about his job, except that he does it, or about his ideas, except in so far as they are bound up with his relationships and therefore his values. It is, of course, the coyness of the Victorian conventions on sexual matters that makes this novel a problem for many twentieth-century readers. In most of Dickens's books sex is much less central than in *Copperfield* and therefore this particular problem is less acute. But Dickens's treatment of sexual relationships, though it has obvious limitations, is not so unrealistic—except, of course, in the descriptive sense—as is sometimes objected. It is true that Em'ly and Martha protest too much,

presumably for the benefit of Miss Burdett Coutts's charitable efforts on behalf of the prostitutes. If their misery and remorse is so continuous—Em'ly's begins *before* she goes off with Steerforth—it is hard to understand why the prospect of sexual freedom should have held such a strong attraction. But the treatment of Rosa Dartle's situation is by no means prudish, and by and large the marriage relationships and problems within the novel are handled with a good deal of realism.

David's struggle in the latter part of the book (he shows himself aware of the issues in his conversation with Agnes in Chapter xxxix) is to turn the immunity he has achieved in his youth into a genuine self-reliance, based not on day-dream idealisation but on an acceptance of the actual complexities of adult life. What Dickens has in the end to offer him contains, of course, its own measure of idealisation. Artistically the unsatisfactory Dora and Steerforth are far more vitally realised than the too perfect Agnes. But this only underlines the fact that the problem at the heart of *David Copperfield* is Dickens's as well as David's: how to advance to a more complete, more morally responsible, realism. It is not a problem that can be solved at one go. And it is a real and painful problem precisely because it involves a decisive further step in the rejection of that petty-bourgeois romanticism, which had sustained and inspired not the worst but the best in both Dickens and David.

The Critical Autonomy of 'Great Expectations'

K. J. FIELDING

OVER the past twenty years there has been an astounding change in the critical value set on Charles Dickens. It may be said to have begun with the two long essays by George Orwell and Edmund Wilson,[1] and *The Dickens World* by Humphry House, about 1940–41. It took some while for it to sink in that Dickens was 'incomparably the greatest writer of his time'; it took even more to appreciate that he might show 'complexity and depth'.[2] Yet it fairly soon came to be generally understood that it had not been enough for someone such as Q. D. Leavis to explain away Dickens's 'best seller' success on the grounds that he was writing 'for a new, a naïve public', and one for which he was well fitted as a novelist mainly because he was 'emotionally not only uneducated but also immature'.[3]

In fact the same writer went even further, and her comments are worth quoting as an example of considered criticism of the thirties which no current critic of Dickens could now accept:

> The novelist who made his living by cheap serial publication had necessarily to abandon cumulative effect for a piecemeal succession of immediate effects. This was not only generally practised by the popular novelist of the forties but explicitly recognised by them. And . . . experience seems to show that to accustom oneself to read on a kind of penny-in-the-slot machine principle is to lose the ability to read in any other way.[4]

One may simply set against these comments the work of

[1] In G. Orwell, *Inside the Whale*, 1940, and E. Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow*, 1941.

[2] E. Wilson, *The Wound and the Bow*, revised ed., London, 1952, p. 3.

[3] Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, 1932, pp. 156–57.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Kathleen Tillotson, who puts Dickens's popularity in the same category as Shakespeare's, and who has explained that 'it is too readily assumed that serial writing is damaging to the artistic unity of the novel'.[1] It is not the place to argue out this difference but enough to put such comments together and reaffirm that a critical revolution has taken place.

It has happened quietly but fast. Much of the impetus has come from English departments in universities and colleges. Yet even the late Humphry House was so sensitive at being dubbed a 'Dickens *scholar*,' that he would have regarded it as an insult: it was a relic of the simple days when writing about Dickens meant joining the ranks of those who merely celebrated his good cheer. It so happens that in the last decade the work of Edgar Johnson, Kathleen Tillotson, John Butt, Sylvère Monod, and many other writers on Dickens has taken the sting out of the remark. Yet so rapid has the change been that many groups of Dickens's readers have been left behind at different stages. There is now a confusing variety of standards and ways of judging his work. At a recent Dickens anniversary dinner, for example, the chairman praised the work of J. Hillis Miller (*Charles Dickens, the World of His Novels*); one of the guest speakers derided it—and, indeed, all serious, academic American criticism; while a third speaker prostrated himself before Hugh Kingsmill's *Charles Dickens, a Sentimental Portrait*, which was fairly dismissed twenty years ago by Edmund Wilson for treating its subject 'as so infantile, pretentious and hypocritical as to deserve only a perfunctory sneer'.[2]

It was perhaps as well there were no Americans present; we may tend to assume their complaisance too easily. Yet the remarks need not have been taken too much to heart. The most critical of the three speakers was Mr. Hesketh Pearson, author of *Dickens, His Character, Comedy, and Career* (1949); and Mr. Pearson's considered view of *Great Expectations*, for example, is that it 'has been overpraised in relation to Dickens's other novels, perhaps because it is shorter than most, possibly because it is less complicated than

[1] K. Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, 1954, p. 21 and p. 40.
[2] p. 2.

most'.[1] No doubt this is an extreme view; and compared with the chapter on the same novel in Professor Miller's book, for example, it is as perfunctory as Kingsmill.

In fact, the whole occasion with its speech-making offered little but the renewal of disquiet at the way in which so much recent discussion of Dickens has gone ahead so fast that it has often left the ordinary reader thinking that he has nothing to choose between popular biography and severely academic criticism. We need the help of criticism. We can learn from it greatly. Whatever we may have lost in comparison with the contemporary reader of Victorian literature, we have undoubtedly gained immeasurably over the past hundred years when it comes to reading a novel such as *Great Expectations*. In any attempt, such as this, to review the novel once again it is inevitable that one should refer to recent criticism: it is not just playing the game of criticising the critics. And yet, by now, even the best of them may sometimes leave us with the impression that as far as 'complexity and depth' may go both reader and critic are beginning to reach their limits.

The three studies of the novel that have given me the greatest insights are 'G.B.S. on *Great Expectations*' by Humphry House (1948; reprinted in *All in Due Time*, 1955), the chapter in *Charles Dickens, The World of His Novels* by J. Hillis Miller (1958), and 'The Hero's Guilt: the Case of *Great Expectations*' by Julian Moynahan (in *Essays in Criticism*, January 1960, Vol. X). Each offers a subtle interpretation; each is informed, thoughtful, persuasive, even brilliant; and they each explicitly recognise both the greatness and the complexity of the novel. Humphry House interpreted it as 'a snob's progress'; Miller regards it as showing a search for 'authentic selfhood'; and Moynahan presents it as an expression of the universal fantasy of 'great expectations', the outcome for the individual's unbounded demand for love and power which is inevitably linked with a sense of guilt. All three quite naturally put forward their interpretations mainly by analysing the development of the hero, Pip. The last two, in particular, have led me to re-examine my own view of the novel,

[1] p. 295.

and left me in some uncertainty. It is the purpose of this essay to suggest that though one should still try to be definite it may be well to avoid being too decided, and that one of the merits of the novel is that it allows the reader a teasing variety of interpretations.

There is much in common between these three recent criticisms, and acceptance of one by no means involves a complete rejection of the others. Yet they are different enough to offer an elementary demonstration of how in creating *Great Expectations*, perhaps more than with any of his other novels, Dickens succeeded in creating a world of his own which he left to express itself, which is not bounded by his comments, nor limited by it being possible to identify too obviously the author's point of view. Whatever may be true of some of the other novels (of *Bleak House*, for example, as seen by E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*, iv) Dickens never depended less on 'bouncing' the reader into accepting what was happening, nor more successfully and deliberately detached himself from his work so that it stands almost completely on its own, offering the reader what he can make of it for himself.

This is fairly well recognised. Certainly all three critics of *Great Expectations* are circumspect about straying away from the novel to search for evidence of Dickens's intentions. House does so quite deliberately, referring to the contemporary scene, Dickens's letters, and the manuscript of the novel, but he depends as much as the others upon analysing the book itself. All three, perhaps, while recognising the meagreness of our information, might have said a little more about how strange this was. It is true that, like Dickens's other novels, the book grew enormously in meaning beyond its first conception; but was there ever a more ludicrous contrast between what critics have written about a great work, and what Dickens had to say when he started it? An idea occurred to him which, he said, 'so opens out before me that I can see the whole of a serial revolving on it, in a most singular and comic manner'. And again, when he sent a first instalment in manuscript to his friend, John Forster: 'I have made the opening, I hope, in its general effect exceedingly droll. I have put a child and a good

natured foolish man, in relations that seem to me very funny. Of course, I have got the pivot in on which the story will turn too—and which indeed, as you remember, was the grotesque tragi-comic conception that first encouraged me. To be quite sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe.'[1]

To call the last sentence (as Professor Miller does) our 'one important sign of the depths which Dickens was plumbing in the conception of the basic motif of *Great Expectations*', shows almost desperation in looking for a sign. After all, it was *Copperfield* which had so moved him, and *Great Expectations* which was meant to be different and 'droll'; and moreover, Dickens appears to have had a way of writing to Forster in this manner about *Copperfield*, e.g. 'I can never open that book as I open any other book'. He merely says that he had been deeply moved by reading the earlier work.

There is, in fact, nothing to guide us. Though Forster, it may well be thought, talked over the novel with Dickens, and the critical comments in his biography of his friend *may* even have been written with the benefit of a knowledge of Dickens's intentions, there is nothing in them to show this one way or the other. Forster's interpretation is the obvious one, and quite sensible. He was not an obtuse man. Yet there is nothing else in the biography, or in the rest of Dickens's published letters, of the slightest interest about *Great Expectations* except the rather cursory discussion of the ending that was altered at the suggestion of Bulwer Lytton. If Dickens had any other purpose than writing a 'tragi-comic' story dealing in a fairly conventional way with the three stages in the development of Pip, he kept it more closely from his friends than the mystery of *Edwin Drood*. No sensitive reader can doubt that rather more is implied in the novel; but that is quite another matter.

In general it is clear from Dickens's letters that when he discussed his novels it was usually in unsophisticated terms. There are occasional hints that it may have been possible to draw him

[1]John Forster, *Life of Dickens*, ed. J. W. T. Ley, 1928, p. 49.

out, and it is easy to believe that his understanding of creative processes and critical problems went much further than he reveals. Yet it is up-hill work trying to demonstrate this part from what is implied in the novels themselves. There is practically nothing to be found in the memorandum book of suggestions for future work that Dickens kept for a time, having started it just before *Little Dorrit*.[1] Of course, it may well be said that it is anachronistic to expect all this. Yet the example of Bulwer Lytton, a perceptive critic, shows we might reasonably hope for much more; even Charlotte Brontë displayed a passionate interest in criticism of her own work and in self-justification; and one can hardly avoid thinking that Dickens was extraordinarily silent about his major rival novelists. I believe that one unpublished letter has been discovered which mentions the Brontës—but one only. He could never be persuaded to say anything of the slightest interest about Thackeray as a novelist; and there is surely a significant contrast between the warm and enthusiastic letters written to the author of *Scenes of Clerical Life* and the author of *Adam Bede*, when there was the possibility of recruiting her as a contributor to one of his weekly periodicals, and the utter silence about her work that followed. Melville is sometimes held up to us as a writer who preserved a dignified reserve in comparison, say, with Mark Twain. Even so, he could write such a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne as the one in which he says of himself, amid much else: 'It is but nature to be shy of a mortal who boldly declares that a thief in jail is as honourable a personage as Gen. George Washington.'[2] Whereas Dickens, though this might be thought to be the main implication of *Great Expectations*, hardly once looks out from under cover. Surely we do not get anywhere near 'the heart of Charles Dickens' in his letters? They may be

[1]Manuscript in the New York Public Library; imperfect transcriptions in the *Life* by John Forster and *Letters of Dickens*, ed. Walter Dexter, 1938, vol. III. Nothing, unless it be a warning for critics, perhaps, about: 'People who persist in defining and analysing their (and everbody else's) moral qualities, motives and what not, at once in the narrowest spirit and the most lumbering manner;—as if one should put up an enormous scaffolding for the building of a pigstye.'

[2]*Letters of Herman Melville*, ed. M. R. Davis and W. H. Gilman, New Haven, 1960, p. 127, Letter of 1 June 1851.

significant because they show, as it were, the lines of his field of force, but not the source of his powers.

The more one learns of his life, therefore, the more one is bound to agree that it is entirely justifiable (with the later novels at least) to seek the heart of what he had to say within the novels, even when it is apparently at variance with what we know of the outward incidents of his life. This is what most recent criticism tries to do: it is concerned to analyse the kind of personal experience that Dickens was trying to convey, while being rather detached and tentative in estimating the merits of his writing.

Yet this already poses other problems. For once we have assented to this, what is one to make of Dickens as a novelist when it seems that he may be writing a story which has not merely a variety of implications, but possibly a number of contradictory ones?[1] And what if we have to suppose that he was unaware of many of them? It may be wrong to assume that he was. Yet, as an assumption, it is no greater than Mr. Moynahan's, for example, when he says of a certain incident in the novel, that 'we need not deny Dickens the insight necessary to the imagining of so ambivalent a response' in Pip—a response, the ambivalence of which lies in his being able to express and even think that he feels forgiveness for Miss Havisham at one moment, and yet a moment or two afterwards to show (by his vision of her hanging from the beam in the old brewery) that he 'hates her in the depths of his being'.

We *need* not deny Dickens this insight, but what if we do? It may quite as well be that the insight we have here (and a valuable one) is Mr. Moynahan's, that it is true to the character of Pip, and yet that the imaginative power that created the character and the incident worked almost blindly. It makes it no easier to assent when Mr. Moynahan goes on to say that 'we should not commit the anachronism of demanding that this response be defined in the novel analytically and self-consciously—that the hero should tell us, "I forgave Miss Havisham as fully as I could, but continued

[1]As an example of the first I would instance *Great Expectations*, of the second, *Our Mutual Friend*.

to think how well it would have been for me if she had never set foot on this earth."'

It is hard to see that to have written like this would have been an anachronism: indeed, it is very like a good deal of *Great Expectations*, as when Pip graciously 'extends his clemency' to Biddy, or describes his feelings towards Joe on the hat-dropping visit to Barnard's Inn (chapters xix and xxvii). Dickens was quite capable of explicitly recognising that a character might behave in a contradictory way towards other characters.[1] On the other hand, it *is* perhaps rather difficult (and possibly anachronistic) to imagine that—at least any earlier in his career than this—he could intentionally have shown this kind of behaviour and have refrained from clearly underlining its implications for the reader. Rosa Dartle, to take an obvious instance, both loves Steerforth and hates him, and this is made apparent quite explicitly by the author and self-consciously by the character. Such contradictions abound in Dickens's characters, but we would not normally expect *self*-analysis from them because they are not usually involved in telling their own stories. A notable exception is Miss Wade's 'History of a Self Tormentor' in *Little Dorrit*; and although the way in which she gives her history is handled rather differently, it does involve both self-consciousness and self-analysis, even though it rather obviously forces the reader to draw conclusions about the character which differ from those of the narrator herself. Various conclusions, in fact, might be drawn from the way her story is handled: one, for example, that it is all too explicit, and another that it marks a considerable advance in the technique of first-person narration, and hence a trend that might lead one to expect greater sophistication than usual in novels to come.

Further discussion, moreover, partly depends on what is meant by an 'anachronism'; for if it is suggested that no other contemporary English novelist could have provided the kind of self-conscious analysis that Mr. Moynahan instances as so improbable,

[1]The memorandum book suggests that the 'germ' for a Dickens character often lay in his perception of a contradiction.

this appears to overlook *Adam Bede*, which had been published only the year before.[1] Since there are certain affinities between the two novels, and (apart from the rapidity of his development as a novelist) Dickens was so quick to take a hint, one might think that if he had wanted to provide it nothing could have been easier for Dickens than to have allowed Pip to analyse himself in precisely this way. By far the more extraordinary advance in story-telling, it seems to me, is that Dickens should have been prepared to imply anything so subtle (if he did) and yet to have left it to the reader without rubbing it in.

The whole question is illustrated again by a problem which Mr. Moynahan sets the reader at the beginning of his article. He points out that, at the end of Chapter lvi, as Pip describes how he took Magwitch's hand at the moment of the convict's death, he writes: 'Mindful, then, of what we had read together, I thought of the two men who went into the Temple to pray, and I knew that there were no better words that I could say beside his bed, than "O Lord, be merciful to him, a sinner!"' Obviously (but for most of us obvious only once it has been pointed out) this is a ludicrous or pharisaic perversion of the publican's prayer, 'God be merciful to me a sinner' (St. Luke, xviii). But what are we to make of it? There are perhaps, three main alternatives: the first that Dickens simply mis-quoted, without a thought, as he was capable of doing,[2] and that it has no especial significance; secondly, that he was, indeed, unaware of it, and it indicates how superficial his frequent by-play with biblical references in the novels can be; and thirdly that Pip, the former blacksmith's boy and respectable partner in Clarriker & Co., was still so unperceptive and snobbish enough neither to know what he was thinking at the moment of

[1]As in Ch. xlvii, where Adam struggles to forgive Arthur Donnithorne, and 'analyses' himself aloud for about a page. It leaves no more to be said, and suggests the great advantages of Dickens's manner in *Great Expectations*.

[2]Compare Ch. xv, where Miss Havisham presents Joe with Pip's 'premium' of 'five-and-twenty guineas', which have become no more than 'five-and-twenty pound' by the time they are given to Mrs. Joe. No doubt Dickens's mistake. Both these slips, as far as I know, were first noted in print by Sylvère Monod in his edited translation of the novel (Classiques Garnier) Paris, 1959.

Magwitch's death, nor even to be aware of it twelve years or more later when he was telling the story.

Putting aside the first two alternatives, we are presented by the third with quite a complex character in Pip, for it seems that we can never accept at face-value anything he has to say. The whole novel is not merely 'a snob's progress', but one in which we can never be sure just what progress has been made. This was implicit in House's analysis of Pip's behaviour in the same death-bed scene. He maintained that Pip was still a snob. Unaware of the possible irony in the prayer, House nevertheless believed that in spite of 'the horror that he feels for Magwitch', Pip revealed to him the story of Estella, addresses him as 'dear Magwitch', recognised their common humanity and took his hand, actions that were 'indeed too terribly true to the nature of snobbery', for: 'Pip could never have maintained such a mood with Magwitch alive, and if he had thought he would recover he would never have told him about Estella. It was a sort of viaticum. And surely Dickens knew what he was doing'.[1]

Surely Dickens knew. But what is one to make of this interpretation on turning back several pages to the end of Chapter liv, in which Pip had said, 'I took my place by Magwitch's side', and 'I felt that that was my place henceforth while he lived'. Is this then also self-deception? Did Pip really still have to overcome 'horror' at his benefactor as Magwitch was dying, and are we really to disbelieve him when he says of himself directly after the arrest: 'For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe.' On one interpretation, therefore, these words would evidently mark the climax of Pip's self-deception; yet on another they are believed to mark the transformation after which 'Magwitch thinks only of Pip . . . and Pip thinks only of Magwitch'.[2]

[1]pp. 208–9. [2]Miller, p. 276.

What is one to make of it then? To most readers the second interpretation is probably preferable, though the other is just possible. Yet all that is clear seems to be that Dickens had reached a point at which he could show considerable art in handling such a story; it is the richer for its alternatives; and that far from rushing forward to identify himself with Pip, he has done what Flaubert advised George Sand: 'One mustn't bring one's own personality on the scene. We must, by an effort of the mind, go over to the characters, as it were, not make them come over to us.'[1]

This was something that Dickens had had to learn, and which he had just described, in his own words, to a would-be contributor to *All the Year Round*: 'My notion always is, that when I have made the people to play out the play, it is, as it were, their own business to do it, and not mine.'[2] In *A Tale of Two Cities* (the novel before *Great Expectations*), so Dickens had explained to Forster, he had wanted the story to express the characters even 'more than they should express themselves by dialogue'.[3] In *Little Dorrit* (the one before that) he had begun the novel with the hope, as he noted on the number-plan, that he could introduce characters whose future connection would not be explained to the reader but would be 'worked out as in life'.[4] Forster is no doubt wrong in setting down as the reason for Dickens's more elaborate preparation of his novels, from the time of *Little Dorrit*, simply the loss of his 'old, unstinted, irrepressible flow of fancy'; it was evidently largely because of a growing interest in the resources of technique, the fruits of which were fully to appear only with *Great Expectations*. We hear of critics who wish to treat the novels as 'autonomous works of art'.[5] But with *Great Expectations* one has little alternative: it is largely imposed by the author

[1]Flaubert, *Correspondence*, 1929, letter of 15–16 December 1866, quoted by Miriam Allott, *Novelists on the Novel*, 1959, p. 271.

[2]*Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. W. Dexter, 1938, III, 461–62, letter of 20 February 1866.

[3]Forster, *Life of Dickens*, ed. Ley, p. 730.

[4]Forster, *Life of Dickens*, ed. Ley, facsimile facing p. 625.

[5]Miller, p. viii, referring to his 'own approach' and Trilling's essay on *Little Dorrit*.

and form of the novel, rather than a self-limitation set by the reader.

It is not really possible to be sure that any single interpretation is right, therefore; nor as long as one can make out for oneself a number of possibilities, is it really desirable to try to be. As far as the reader goes, it may be best to allow that the characters exist in a world of their own.

One may wonder, even, whether this respect for the autonomy of the novels on the part of every critic is altogether a good thing. As adopted by Trilling and Miller, it would be asinine to complain. Yet it may be that some of our critical problems in discussing the novels are largely self-imposed. It may be that we make too much, for example, of the whole question of Pip's personal 'guilt'. Turning away from the world of the novels once more, and looking for a moment at the real world by which Dickens was so passionately disturbed, one can catch glimpses of a society the members of which did well to raise a feeling of guilt at its recent treatment of crime and punishment. It is a subject, with respect to Dickens, of which there is so much to know, and of which still very little is systematically known.

Taking up, at random, a volume of memoirs rescued from the shilling-box in a second-hand bookshop, *The Reminiscences of Sir Henry Hawkins, Baron Brampton* (1817–1907) it seems to me that even in the pages of such a book we can begin to share the world of a reader of the time which is not altogether irrelevant to understanding the novel. These memoirs tell the story of a famous advocate whose most unforgettable childhood recollection was of the sight of the corpse of a young man, executed for rick-burning, being borne past his schoolroom window by the young man's parents. It was a world in which he found that the law 'at every assize, was like a tiger let loose upon the district', in which prisoners were sentenced to death in batches, as Magwitch was in the memorable scene at the Old Bailey. It was a time when the Old Bailey was 'a very cesspool for the offscourings of humanity', though it was 'the best school in which to learn the work of cross-examination', and when even the unsentimental

Hawkins found that his 'greatest delight . . . was the obtaining an acquittal of someone whose guilt nobody could doubt'. Newgate itself, as he describes it, still had a room as late as 1852 in which counsel might interview prisoners, which was decorated in the style of Little Britain by countless death-masks showing the 'indentation of the hangman's rope under the ear'. These impressed even Hawkins 'with a disgust at the brutal tendency of the age' he had lived through; and he was a contemporary of Dickens, and one of his amateur players in the company at Knebworth.

It all proves nothing, yet one never knows quite what to make of Dickens's own openly-expressed views on crime. Against certain passages in *Great Expectations* one might set the passionate outburst one finds in a letter to Forster at the Home Secretary's pardon for a poisoner convicted of murder. It was written about this time (25 August 1859) and followed by a furious article in *All the Year Round* ('Five Points of the Criminal Law', 24 September 1859). It seems to me that it may have a reference to the treatment of Orlick and Mrs. Joe; but that is not to be dealt with here. The same murderer, as it happens, was immediately passed on to Sir Henry Hawkins, who managed to inflict on him the penalty of twelve months for bigamy.

We do well to remember that Dickens was writing in a world in which an Attorney-General could address the young men of a Y.M.C.A. and assure them: 'I am perfectly confident that the principle of mutual benevolence, of a universal desire to do good, derived from Christianity . . . is one of the best and most sure modes of securing even temporary success in life (Cheers).'[1] It may prove nothing once again, but it puts the novel back into a world ripe for irony; and it may be, as regards Hawkins, that Pip's feeling of the 'taint of prison or crime', immediately after his visit to Newgate, was shared by others who had lived through the first half of the century, and that Pip's own sense of guilt has been rather exaggerated.[2]

[1]Joseph Irving, *Annals of Our Time*, 1869, p. 402, entry for 4 October 1859.
[2]But see Moynahan, *Essays in Criticism*, Jan. 1960 p. 62.

Of course, I may be exposing myself to the same sort of taunt as Gissing, who is quoted by Professor George Ford as saying, 'Heaven forbid that I should attribute to Dickens a deliberate allegory'. 'In the light of recent criticism', suggests Professor Ford, 'Gissing's assumption has itself, in turn, become antiquated. We may find it the comment of a more literal-minded than a literary-minded critic.'[1] So we might, if that had been all that Gissing wrote. But there may yet be a place for a measure of literal-mindedness; there is still a world of possibilities for discussion over a hundred years after the completion of the novel; and there is still much to be learnt.

[1]G. H. Ford, *Dickens and His Readers*, Princeton, 1955, p. 249; a most valuable work, but it appears to trip in discrediting Gissing, who was careful to explain that, while Dickens shunned 'allegory', some of his figures could be 'purely symbolical'.

A Fragment of Propertius

I saw you in my dreams, my love,
your ship a wreck; your weary arms
were trailing through the Ionian sea;
too weak to lift your sodden hair—
confessing all your lies to me.

A. French

The Choral Symphony: 'Our Mutual Friend'

ROBERT BARNARD

PERHAPS the most surprising verdict on *Our Mutual Friend* was that of G. K. Chesterton; he called it 'a happy return to the earlier manner of Dickens, late in Dickens's life'. He goes on to say that the book 'begins with a good piece of rowdy satire, wildly exaggerated and extremely true'. In fact, as any reader knows, the book begins with Lizzie Hexam and her father sculling with the tide down the Thames—and in the boat is the corpse of a man, beaten and disfigured by the river's flow. Hardly a scene of Pickwickian joviality! Of course Chesterton was thinking of the second chapter, but even here it would be quite mistaken to see a return to an earlier manner. The parasitic creatures who dine with (or on) the Veneerings have no comic vitality, no diabolical charm; we do not warm to them in spite of their faults; in fact, the whole scene is Trollope with a dash of Swift:

> A grisly little fiction concerning her lovers is Lady Tippins's point. She is always attended by a lover or two, and she keeps a little list of her lovers, and she is always booking a new lover, or striking out an old lover, or putting a lover in her black list, or promoting a lover to her blue list, or adding up her lovers, or otherwise posting her book. Mrs. Veneering is charmed by the humour, and so is Veneering. Perhaps it is enhanced by a certain yellow play in Lady Tippins's throat, like the legs of scratching poultry.

Still, if we disagree with Chesterton emphatically as to the key characteristics of the book, we may take his point that the first two chapters are sure indicators of manner and mood. One of the first things that strikes us is the uncertainty with which Dickens is presenting his material. One of the sure signs that Dickens has little grasp on what he is trying to do is that the speech of his

characters lacks verisimilitude. Now we may accept the fact that Lizzie Hexam speaks better than her father; we may even accept that she should speak better than her educated brother. It is a Dickensian convention that the virtuous heroine, however low-born, speaks a simple yet stately prose—prose that is still spoken English, yet it is English as it is spoken on formal occasions, or at public meetings. That is the way Dickens establishes the atmosphere around his heroines, ensures that we regard them in the right light. We should not jib at this, but we do jib at the way Gaffer Hexam changes uncertainly from literate to illiterate speech. When he addresses Rogue Riderhood Dickens tries to emphasise the moral superiority of the man by making his speech more euphonious and eloquent:

'Has a dead man any use for money? Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? T'other world. What world does money belong to? This world. How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it?'

Yet when Dickens comes to depict Hexam with Mortimer Lightwood his speech has suffered a remarkable deterioration:

'Tain't not to say here, but its close by. I do everything reg'lar. I've giv' notice of the circumstance to the police, and the police have took possession of it. No time ain't been lost, on any hand.'

Hexam is not the only failure of this sort. The Mr. Boffin who chats amiably with Silas Wegg when we first meet the two is very different from the man who repulses the Lammles over the breakfast table—and he is to change yet again for the final scene with Bella and John, where he once more says 'reg'lar' and 'p'inted'. There are plenty more examples of the same uncertainty in dialogue: Betty Higden's eloquence on the Poor Law, the impossible banter of the Lammles, and Alfred Lammle's conversations with Fledgeby—'Repeat your words louder, sir. The just indignation of a gentleman has sent the blood rushing to my head. I don't hear you. . . . ' And similarly, when Julius Handford starts meditating on the strange history by which his fortune has been shaped, Dickens relapses into a stagy series of 'said he's'. All this suggests that Dickens has not got the raw materials of his

story under control—both plot and characters tend to fall apart in his hands. The inconsistency of accent and manner of the personages in differing situations indicates quite clearly that the author is not quite sure what they are meant to stand for, or even what they are meant to do. In desperation he tries to arouse in the reader a series of reactions; and he succeeds in arousing only an intermittent but nagging bewilderment.

This is all the more surprising because in the first two chapters the chief themes and the total atmosphere of the story have been suggested by Dickens with his habitual mastery. Lizzie Hexam watching horrified over the dead man is to be paralleled later by her heroic rescue of her lover from the same river. The Thames has many purposes in the novel; it images the dirt and squalor of the waterside portions of the novel as it laps against the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, or as its filthy depths receive the bodies of men; again it ties up with the image of the Boffin fortune as a swamp, a moral swamp in which dignity and humanity are forgotten in the chase for a portion of the great dust-piles; and it has to provide an image of death and of life, negation and reaffirmation—Riderhood and Wrayburn are both saved from it, the one to do more harm, the other to find a spiritual regeneration.

These complex aims are achieved from the beginning: we are reminded again and again of the way in which each character finds his life bound up with the river in a sinister dependency:

'The very fire that warmed you when you were a babby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockers that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or other.'

Giving life or destroying it, bringing trade, bringing livelihood, carrying long-lost heirs, the river is the key to the whole story, and the first chapter tells us this very clearly.

But in Dickens the story is frequently inadequate to encompass the main theme. Much of his important matter is quite peripheral as far as advancing the plot is concerned—that is why any dramatic adaptation of a late Dickens novel which concentrates on the plot seems so spare and unvital. In *Our Mutual Friend* the

proliferation of character and incident seems even more wilful than usual. The characters seem to move in wholly disparate circles: the inner circle contains the Boffins, Wegg, the Wilfers, and John Harmon; then there is a slightly larger circle containing Lizzie, Wrayburn, Jenny, Riderhood, and Riah; and astride the outer ring sit the Veneerings, the Podsnaps, the Lammles, and Lady Tippins. What connection has Riah with Lady Tippins, or Betty Higden with the Lammles? Mrs. Veneering leaves cards for the Boffins and her husband employs Mr. Wilfer, but they hardly even see any of the main characters. But their position, and that of Podsnap, Tippins, and Twemlow is accurately defined by Dickens: they are the Social Chorus. In their cynical and futile chatter every noble gesture is defiled, every evil deed treated with bored sensationalism. All things must be reduced to the dirty grey of their own personalities—or put aside as 'unfit for the ears of the young person'. Otherwise the aching vacuity of their lives would be too much to bear. Their values are market values—mere profit and loss: 'A man may do anything lawful for money, but for no money!——Bosh.' The eternal diners-out are the moral equivalent of our Sunday papers, and their effect is that of a dirty sieve. But they are more than that too, because the whole basis of their social intercourse is money, and money is the main theme of *Our Mutual Friend.* At the very lowest the effects of money are seen in the simple desire to earn a miserable livelihood: Hexam rifles the pockets of dead men: 'What world does money belong to? This world'—and Rogue Riderhood swears his soul away for a police reward. Goodness and charity are powerless when they have to fight money. Mr. Riah must cover up for Fledgeby because he has been caught in the financial web of debts and obligations himself. Mr. Boffin cannot stop the weak-willed and parasitic from battening on his property or profiting by him socially. Throughout the book the sombre tone, the atmosphere of putrescence and decay, is maintained by the importance given to the great dust heaps, garbage, ashes, and dung, which tower in the yard of Harmony Jail, otherwise known as Boffin's Bower. These mounds mean wealth: because of these mounds Boffin is

courted by Society: because of these mounds John Harmon's father mistreated his family: because of these mounds Bella Wilfer is left a widow before she was a wife, fretting to get away from the degrading genteel poverty of her home. And in these mounds, symbolically, is hidden one of John Harmon senior's wills. Into this picture of the interwoven images of wealth and corruption the Social Chorus fits very well.

Yet the impression given by *Our Mutual Friend* is not that of a well-planned book. It is clear that Dickens had thought out his scheme well: our minds are continually occupied by the prospect of a money-corrupted society. What is more he had wedded atmosphere and image securely to his theme in a way that should have made for a unified whole:

> They were in a neighbourhood which looked like a toy neighbourhood taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public house facing nowhere; here, another unfinished street already in ruins; there, a church; here, an immense new warehouse; there, a dilapidated old country villa; then, a medley of black ditch, sparkling cucumber-frame, rank field, richly cultivated kitchen-garden, brick viaduct, arch-spanned canal, and disorder of frowziness and fog. As if the child had given the table a kick, and gone to sleep.

This is perfect, and absolutely in key: the Gods are not hostile, they have simply gone to sleep. Equally good is a passage a little further on, where Dickens describes Smith Square, and notes 'that there was a deadly kind of repose on it, more as though it had taken laudanum than fallen into a natural rest . . . '. Quite obviously Dickens took immense thought of *how to do it*, integrated many strands of thought and impression. Even the plot, though unlikely—and we have no right to expect anything else in Dickens—is presented dramatically and convincingly.

What went wrong? Principally, I think, the book fails because Dickens was losing his faculty for writing serious comedy. In his greatest books his humour is at once satire, protest and commentary. He weds fantastic character-drawing to hard-hitting realistic narrative and description; everything is larger than life, yet recognisable as life, and thereby the nature of his protest and

comment becomes doubly clear. In much of *Our Mutual Friend* this wedding fails to take place. He does succeed in Podsnap and the diners-out, certainly, and this makes them the most memorable characters in the book, but it is relevant to point out that in a play the chorus ought to be the least memorable part. If the story had gone as it should, we ought to remember Wegg or Boffin, Lizzie or Eugene. Now we may note that in the serious portion of the book Dickens is more successful than usual. We may not care much for Eugene—his weariness becomes wearisome—but Lizzie is strong yet gentle, virtuous yet sufferable. John Harmon may be a heroic blank, but Bella Wilfer is reasonably individual and quite charming. Dickens only seriously fails with the latter pair when Bella has to announce the approach of a baby: 'Do you remember, John, on the day we were married, Pa's speaking of the ships that might be sailing towards us from the unknown seas? . . . I think . . . among them . . . there is a ship upon the ocean . . . bringing . . . to you and me . . . a little baby, John.' (Why could not Dickens be sensible about babies, he had fathered enough of them? One longs for a dose of the George Eliot order of common sense.) But Dickens was not perceptive enough as a serious artist to make these figures bear the whole weight of the book. His method makes it inevitable that the comic characters should carry the structure, should be the germinating influence of narrative and theme. It is here that things fall apart. For Wegg, Venus, and Boffin are odd, grotesque, even gruesome—but they are not funny. They have not an ounce of comic force. As a rule they divorce themselves into two component parts. We can recognise the humour of Mr. Pecksniff or Uriah Heep while being at the same time sensible of their menace. Wegg either plots, or he reads comic and curious verse; the two sides of his character seem to have no meeting point. Similarly the fine humanity of a Caddy Jellyby or a Mr. Micawber is reinforced, not weakened by their humorous aspects: this is what humanity is like, a laughable surface, yet deep wells of sympathy and goodness underneath—the one an expression of the other. But Mr. Boffin virtuous is quite a different man from Mr. Boffin as the

golden dustman. The earlier dustman *could* have confronted the Lammles in a dignified and serious way, but he would not have done it with the prosy, conventional attitude that is taken by the later Boffin. This is the reason for the marked change of accent noted earlier on. The author was not quite sure of Boffin's stature as a human being, or his place in the narrative.

Nor can it be claimed that the comic parts of these dual personalities are particularly successful. Dickens's pessimism, or perhaps his decreased vitality, makes his habitual love of the grotesque seem merely diseased. Venus finding human teeth in the coffee pot, Wegg prodding the revolting mounds with his wooden leg, these are hardly happy inspirations. Again, Jenny ought, judging by all Dickens previous achievements, to be a memorable creation, odd, yet richly human. But she does not turn out like that at all. Her berating of her father displays her as a juvenile fish-wife; her nature is as twisted as her body, and she evaporates all the sympathy we feel for her automatically at her first appearance. In part, it will be said, this is an indication of the new and deeper pessimism of Dickens's attitude to Society and its works. Yet when Jenny and Sloppy start courting at the end of the book we hardly get a warm feeling inside—and Dickens obviously thinks we ought to, and intends that we should. It is often said that Dickens could no longer find the works of man, his follies and his sins, to be a fit subject for his old boisterous humour. This is probably true, but it is also true that Dickens was losing his comic touch generally—the whole technique. Mrs. Wilfer is an example of this: the first description is Chaucerian in its zestful detail, exact and telling.

> She was much given to tying up her head in a pocket-handkerchief, knotted under the chin. This head-gear, in conjunction with a pair of gloves worn within doors, she seemed to consider as at once a kind of armour against misfortune (invariably assuming it when in low spirits or difficulties), and as a species of full-dress.

I called this Chaucerian; the comparison that immediately springs to mind is with the Miller's wife, and the comparison would not be to the disadvantage of the later piece. Yet Chaucer would

not have given one of his characters such a monotonous, droning catch-phrase as Mrs. Wilfer's! 'It is as you think, R.W., not as I do.' Dickens himself gets tired of it, but the treatment remains just slightly too heavy and crude: Bella, for instance, says towards the end of the book 'Not that my life has been lonely, for I could sometimes have wished it to be lonelier, instead of having Ma going on like the Tragic Muse with a face-ache in majestic corners . . .'. This is not the authentic voice of the great humorist.

But it would be unfair to lay the final emphasis on the book's failures. It has been over-praised—especially by modern critics who seem more concerned with social or symbolical values than with literary ones—but it has many virtues, many things that are brought off successfully and remain gratefully in the memory. And I would not deny that it is possible to see in these successes indications that Dickens's genius was not weakening but merely groping after new directions; Bradley Headstone is one of these successes—stern, self-controlled, yet fanatical and obsessive. This achievement is something that Dickens had been leading up to all his creative life. We have had before the villain in love with villainy, the figure of melodrama, gnashing his teeth and clutching the air, who feeds his self-love with the pains of other men: Ralph Nickleby was such a man. We have had, too, the man who represses his own emotions in order to appear rational, unmoved, unperplexed—to whom every human problem is a matter of plus and minus, profit and loss: Mr. Gradgrind is the great example. Here, in Bradley Headstone, the two types are combined: the years of repression and discipline have left a trail of banked-up, destructive fires. Once they have fixed upon an object their passion is quite irresistible. Dickens hints very subtly at the nature of these repressions and their cause in a brief but significant passage; Headstone has exchanged clothes with Riderhood, as part of his revenge plot: 'And whereas, in his own schoolmaster clothes, he usually looked as if they were the clothes of some other man, he now looked, in the clothes of some other man, or men, as if they were his own.' In other words, the life of a pedant has

restricted energies which might have found a proper and healthy outlet in an active life, until they have turned themselves inward to abnormal passions and self-destructiveness. The repressions of such a man are admirably yet succinctly sketched in:

'I suppose—your sister——' with a curious break both before and after the words, 'has received hardly any teaching, Hexam?'
'Hardly any, sir.'
'Sacrificed, no doubt, to her father's objections. I remember them in your case. Yet—your sister—scarcely looks or speaks like an ignorant person.'
'Lizzie has as much thought as the best, Mr. Headstone. Too much, perhaps, without teaching. I used to call the fire at home her books, for she was always full of fancies—sometimes quite wise fancies, considering—when she sat looking at it!'
'I don't like that,' said Bradley Headstone.
His pupil was a little surprised by this striking in with so sudden and decided and emotional an objection, but took it as a proof of the master's interest in himself.

Hexam is another of Dickens's pictures of moral decline under the influence of self-love or a desire for money. Hexam provides the perfect foil for Headstone, and the master's relationship with him gives us a glimpse of his inexperience in dealing with human beings as such—he dismally fails to see the overmastering selfish streak in his pupil.

Most successful of all are the Podsnaps and their circle. Chesterton complains that they are 'uninteresting', and, of course, as people they are, and in real life they would be. But artistically no character need be uninteresting—it all depends on the treatment, and on the context in which they are placed. Dickens does not attempt a very thorough study of the reasons for their pathetic failure, but he does place them in a context where their inane personalities can make their greatest effect. Mr. Podsnap's party is constructed with enormous art. At first Dickens plays with Podsnap in the old manner, luring him on to make a perfect fool of himself in the most dignified manner possible—this is close to what David Cecil calls his 'pure' humour. Then suddenly, clashing against all this, comes the 'stray Personage' who intimates that 'some half-dozen people had lately died in the streets of

starvation'. He could hardly have caused more consternation if he had been Banquo's ghost. At this Dickens drops entirely the cloak of irony, and lays into Podsnap with a savage commentary —as he had done with Pumblechook. After trying to put the man down by suggesting that he is driving at 'Centralisation' (and similar foolish abstractions are used for exactly the same purposes even today) Mr. Podsnap winds up by accusing the meek personage of 'flying in the face of Providence'—and the author bitingly comments on this absurd and irreverent conventional phrase. A similar technique is employed in the election chapter, where the scenes of buoyant humour ('Veneering institutes an original comparison between the country and a ship') are suddenly punctured by the information that all this electoral flurry is a farce, since the affair has been rigged, and there is no opposition. In the continual apposition of comedy and reality, Dickensian humour is seen at its finest. He leaves himself plenty of room for savagery, for he never created beings more contemptible. Fledgeby is perfect, his cowardly nature conflicting with his wish to be objectionable, his swaggering bearing betrayed when his hands creep up to his face to feel for the elusive whisker-growth. The creation of Riah is on the whole a mistake (Dickens tried to make reparation to the Jews for his earlier creation of Fagin) yet the contrast between the two men in their scenes together is brilliantly effective. So is the contrast at the end of the book between Twemlow and the rest of the Social Chorus—though we may feel that his attitude gives too much credit to Eugene and too little to Lizzie, for if anyone is 'demeaning himself' it is she.

Even better, perhaps, than the characters are the comments, the incidental pieces of filling in, which always make a Dickens novel so rich: the knighting of Lady Tippins's husband, the marriage of the Wilfers, the social world as it calls on the Boffins. Who but Dickens could have written this account of Charlie Hexam's school:

> . . . All the place was pervaded by a grimly ludicrous pretence that every pupil was childish and innocent. This pretence, much favoured by the lady-visitors,

led to the ghastliest absurdities. Young women, old in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, the Adventures of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the mill; severely reproved and morally squashed the miller when she was five and he was fifty; divided her porridge with the singing birds; denied herself a new nankeen bonnet, on the ground that the turnips did not wear nankeen bonnets . . . who plaited straw and delivered the dreariest orations to all comers, at all sorts of unseasonable times.

The warmth and humanity of such comments shine through a novel that is grey and despairing. It charters the destruction of a city and a society by the lust for money and for the universal panacea, shares. London has changed since that time: the destructive buildings have themselves been destroyed, and the odd fields and market gardens have vanished forever. In the square where Lizzie and Jenny scraped a modest living there has risen incongruously Transport House and the Conservative Political Centre. Yet Dickens's version of the old city still strikes us as real and true, because he penetrated to the hearts of the inhabitants, to the unchanging attitudes of men who make their money there. This is perhaps the greatest achievement of *Our Mutual Friend*. Like the source of Mr. Boffin's wealth it is a dung-heap of pure gold.

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